

# Aligning PRINCE2® with AgilePM™

White Paper

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Structure and governance



Speed and agility

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# Overview

These are the notes of my presentation at the APMG Showcase on 3rd July 2014.

The purpose of the master class was to share some of my experiences in implementing AgilePM™ (Agile Project Management) and the lessons I have learnt so far for what works and what can make the move towards a more agile approach to project management harder to achieve.



## Opening Remarks

I began the presentation by explaining my perspective and the principles that I apply to the adoption of agile project management:

### 1. Don't lose the ground we have already won

Over the last 10-15 years there has been a lot of effort to increase the professionalism of project management. Those of us that are active in this profession must be careful not to damage this progress by turning to our stakeholders and saying 'forget what we were saying about PRINCE2®, that's been superseded by the new and exciting way of managing projects using AgilePM™'.

This change of heart will lead to distrust of advice on how to manage projects, but also risks throwing away the advantages that existing PRINCE2® based approaches have given many organisations who have accepted that sound project management is supported by a PRINCE2® based methodology. Use of PRINCE2® has:

- firmly established the need for effective project sponsorship and has helped us move away from situations where every aspect of the project was the responsibility of the Project Manager, with only a comment from the project sponsor 'don't fail' whilst providing no support whatsoever.
- established the project lifecycle and the need for defining and documenting key information.
- established that there are key decision points throughout the project lifecycle that stakeholders need to pay attention to.

### 2. Change the emphasis, not the structure

We cannot ask non-project professionals to unlearn what they have learnt about project lifecycles, project documentation and the kind of decisions they are likely to be involved in. We have to build on what they already know, not rubbish all the time and effort they have put in to build their understanding of project management.

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A client said to me a couple of weeks ago when we were discussing their adoption of agile project management – “don't change any of the names of the documents, it's taken us 4 years for the sponsors to know what a PID is!”

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Any change of name, for documents, meetings or roles risks the move to agile project management becoming all about these tangible changes, and not about the change in culture and mindset that is needed for successful agile working. It is always easier to concentrate on the structure and content of documents and job descriptions and make that the focus of the resistance to the change to agile. However, resistance to this relatively unimportant part of project management prevents any concentration on the real changes to what is delivered and what work is prioritised.

So this isn't a master class for purists from either the agile or the PRINCE2® schools of thought, it is for the pragmatists like me who passionately believe in the benefits of agile project management but know that we have to implement it within the constraints of existing approaches and existing project management and project sponsor capability, which is often based on PRINCE2®.

## Starting Point for Implementation of AgilePM™

My starting point for any implementation is the existing methodology and structure that exists within an organisation. In the UK this is most likely to be based on PRINCE2® but my comments could equally apply to APM (Association for Project Management) or PMI (Project Management Institute) based approaches as they are all single delivery/waterfall methods.

I have found that in large part an existing waterfall methodology such as PRINCE2® can be aligned to more agile thinking through a change in emphasis, not a wholesale change in structure and governance.

I am going to demonstrate this by looking at two elements of agile and PRINCE2® :

- the roles
- the project lifecycle

## Roles and Responsibilities

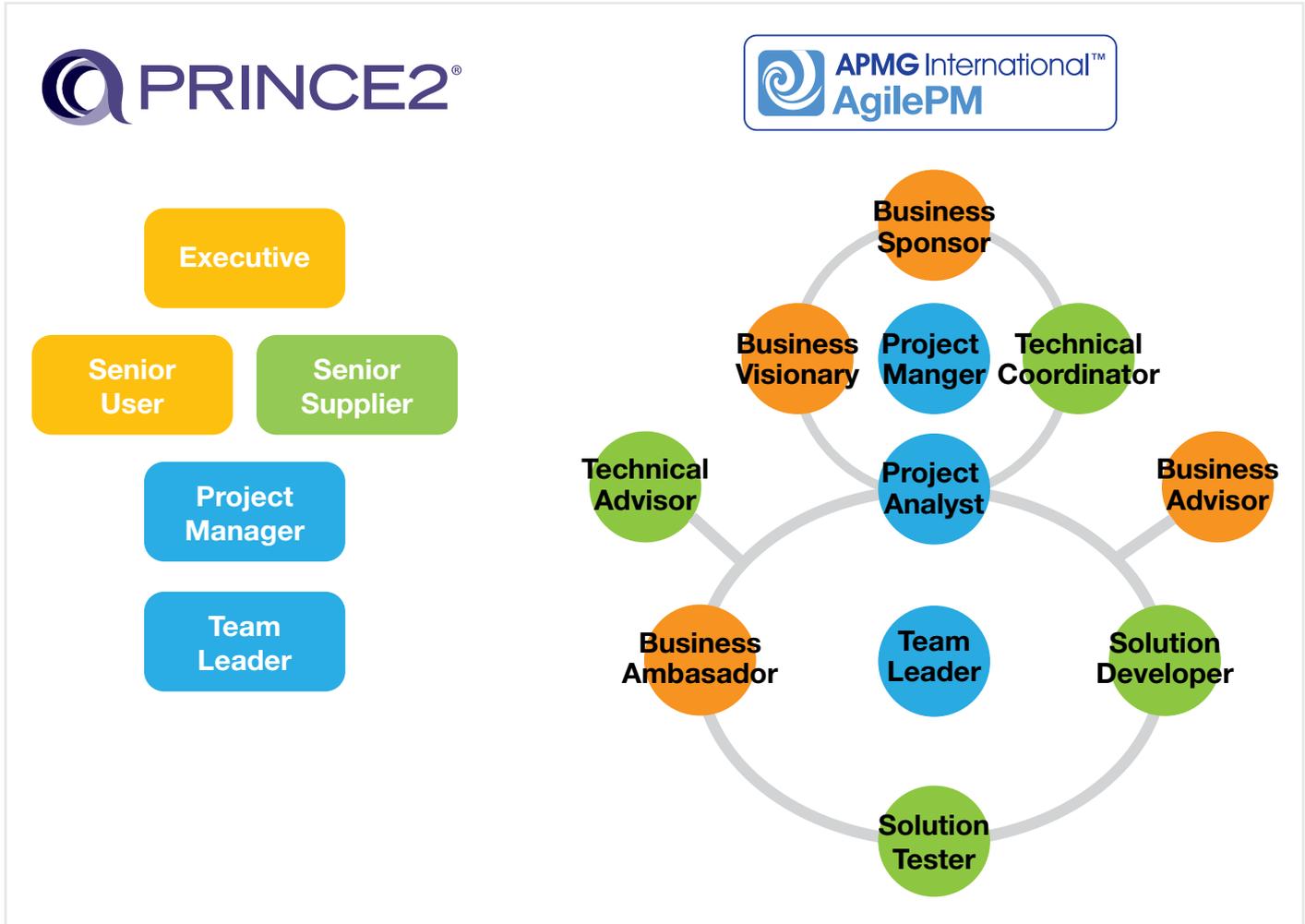
The roles that underpin the PRINCE2® project management approach align pretty closely to those identified in the AgilePM™ framework. When I am implementing an agile project management approach, I take a pragmatic view, explaining to customers that it doesn't matter what job titles people use, it's what they are actually doing in their roles that matter.



## Senior Stakeholders

As shown in this diagram, there is a close alignment between the agile emphasis on Business Sponsor, Business Visionary and Technical Coordinator and Executive, Senior User and Senior Supplier. Both of these groupings represent the senior stakeholders on the project and are the source of decisions for scope, viability and funding.

Personally, I like the description of the Business Visionary role in AgilePM™ better than that of the Senior User in PRINCE2® because of the emphasis on clarifying how the business will be operating once the project has delivered, and the links between the vision and the expected benefits.



## Project Roles

The Project Manager and Project Team roles don't cause us any problems either. I like the identification of the specific roles within the team that agile provides for us, but there is a similar structure between AgilePM™ as there is in PRINCE2® with a team being shown as subordinate to the Project Manager role.

So technically the roles have a lot of overlap, but if we are to move towards an agile approach within an organisation that has the PRINCE2® roles, what needs to change? Well, it's the emphasis on trust and empowerment and the immediacy of decisions when issues are escalated that are the real challenges.

To carry out the role successfully, it is a step up from the day to day responsibilities established in PRINCE2®. This is because the Project Manager is not merely responsible for the escalation of issues to the Project Board and the dissemination of messages to the team from the Project Board. They have a responsibility to look for any and every possible impediment to progress that might impede the work of the Project Team and remove it.

So effectively they have a roving, proactive role for searching out and resolving issues. In my experience, this level of proactive engagement across all stakeholders, including other parts of the organisation that provide inputs or are capable of placing constraints on the project is very similar to that of a Programme Manager, as defined in the 'Managing Successful Programmes' framework.

In one organisation which is moving towards agile project management, they have struggled to adopt the ideas of self-directed teams and the empowerment of the team under the day to day encouragement of a Team Leader. Our assessment indicated that only a small proportion of their current Project Managers were ready for this enhanced role, whilst many of them were already performing the Team Leader role alongside their project planning activities. However, in reality, the Project Manager job title commands a premium, often in the region of £10,000 to £15,000 over the Team Leader role, so there was no appetite for these staff to self-select the Team Leader role as they all wished to retain their status and salary.

I don't have an easy answer for this dilemma. To enable the continued adoption of the agile approach the organisation has effectively asked these staff to take on both roles. However, in the longer term I think it gives us a lot of criteria for what we should reasonably expect from Project Managers:

- Ability to engage stakeholders at the senior level
- Willingness to challenge the status quo and be innovative in overcoming challenges
- Appreciation of the activities needed to effectively embed the project deliverables and realise the benefits from them

Certainly, the experience in this agile implementation has given a lot of food for thought to those responsible for hiring new project staff, and for those in HR responsible for benchmarking of salaries and developing capabilities and offering training programmes.

Similarly, those in senior management positions i.e. Project Boards are uncomfortable with devolving more power down to the Project Teams without the 'safety blanket' of a single Project Manager who acts as their interface with the project.

However, failure to address this devolution of power prevents agile working in practice. The one thing that cannot remain as you transition from PRINCE2® to agile project management is the escalation process that requires the Project Board to take a large proportion of the decisions. It is not possible to deliver projects (and increments and timeboxes) within tight timescales whilst escalating lots of decisions.

Senior Managers simply do not have the capacity to get together at short notice to debate and resolve project issues. Often they need at least several days' notice to convene a meeting, but equally, many Project Boards still prefer to meet on a set schedule, making the Project Team wait until their next meeting to resolve any issues. This in-built delay causes a lot of problems when 'deliver on time' is the key principle underpinning the project approach.

To resolve this it is important to help senior managers appreciate the full range of issues that may come up during the life of the project, and identify with them which they must be involved in resolving and which they can allow the team and the Project Manager to resolve between themselves in a more timely fashion. The key to this activity is ensuring that the percentage of those issues that must be resolved by senior managers is only about 10-15%, with the vast majority being below their radar!

A core contributor to enabling this approach to work is to identify a Business Ambassador that has the confidence of the senior managers, as this often helps bridge the gap between senior managers giving up their decision making and that decision making being retained by those most impacted by the project and not by the Project Team.

## Project Lifecycle

There is plenty of scope to align the steps in the lifecycle and the associated documentation specified within PRINCE2® with the activities defined in AgilePM™. It is not the structure of the headings in the documents that needs to change, it is the content that needs a change in emphasis.

Primarily this change in emphasis is a shift to identifying the business reasons for the project and describing the problems or opportunities it is to resolve or exploit instead of describing exactly what will be delivered.

In my experience, this change in emphasis can cause friction between the Project Team and the Users. This is because in an agile environment, the Project Team needs to ask lots of questions about the improvements and advantages that must be realised by the project. They need Users to identify and describe the business environment and how it needs to be changed instead of setting out the features and functions that the Users want.



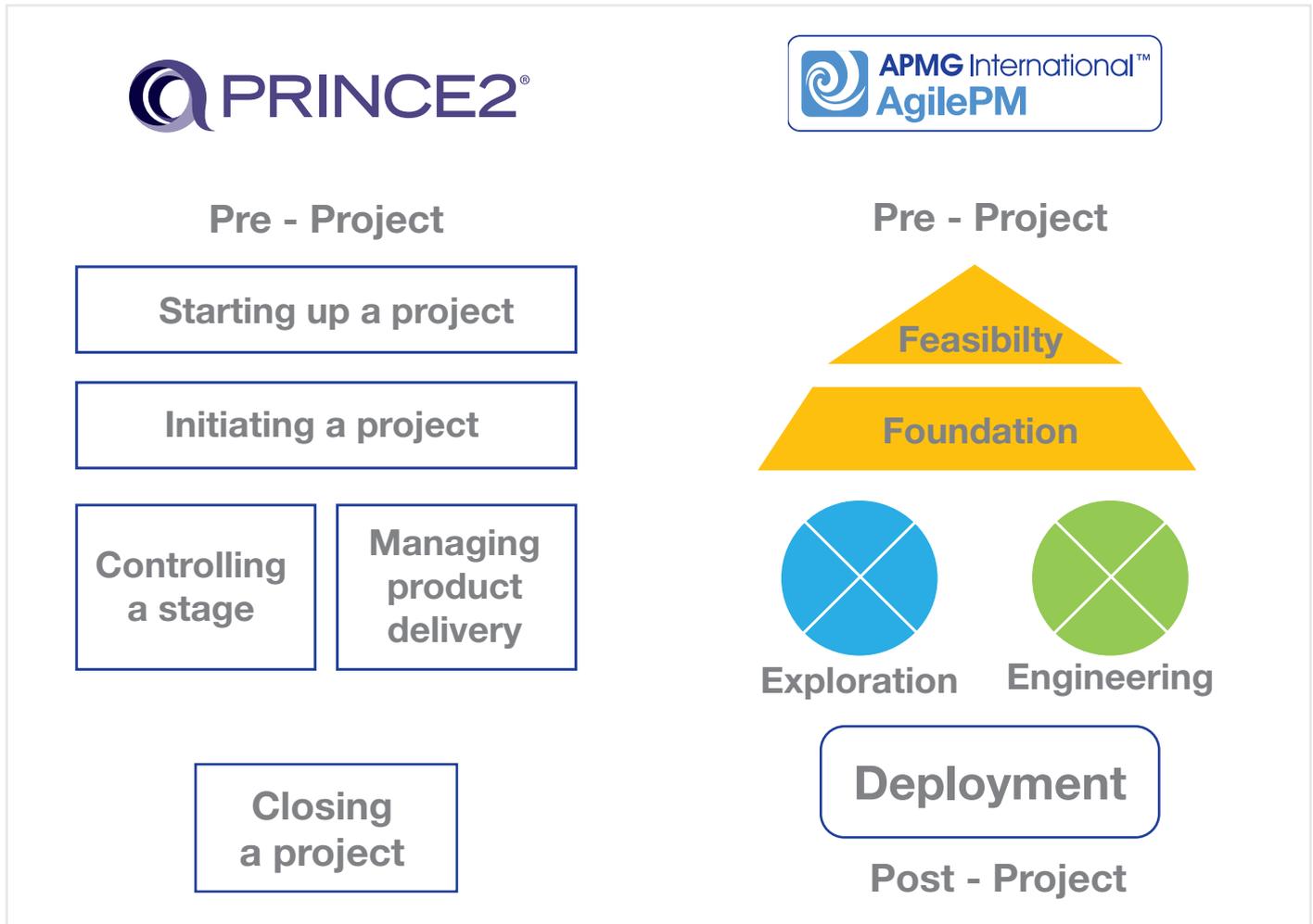
This is because in an agile environment, the Project Team are responsible for producing a solution that will enable the Users to realise benefits. However, this solution will evolve throughout the project lifecycle in response to the feedback from elements of the solution that are demonstrated to Users at regular delivery points throughout the project lifecycle.

As we can see from the diagram, the high level processes in PRINCE2® and AgilePM™ are broadly similar, but the emphasis does need to change to meet the needs of an agile environment.

## Pre-project: Project Mandate (PRINCE2®) or Terms Of Reference (AgilePM™)

Even at this early stage of the project, where it is still only an idea, and its validity has not been verified, we still need to shift the emphasis towards ‘business need’. It doesn’t matter how informally projects are triggered, we need to ensure that even from this earliest point we are not encouraging the specification of requirements. We need to keep the emphasis on the opportunities or the problems that the business need to address.

Senior managers in one of the organisations where I am helping to build an agile approach believe that a core benefit of AgilePM™ is the emphasis on challenging the need for the project as they believe it is making their project teams less passive. They have been concerned that the user/project relationship suffers from a reactive approach by Project Managers who are looking for projects to manage and are happy to say “Just tell us what you want and we will build it.”



### Starting Up – Project Brief (PRINCE2®) and Feasibility - Outline Business Case (AgilePM™)

The emphasis on business need and the benefits to be realised by the project needs to continue in this process. PRINCE2® and AgilePM™ include an outline business case as part of their suggested documentation, although in PRINCE2® this is part of the Project Brief. There is similar emphasis in both methods on ensuring the feasibility and viability of the project.

Probably one of the reasons that I like AgilePM™ so much is that the benefits of the project are so integral to organising the work. Agile project management relies on the prioritisation of requirements against the benefits to define which requirements will be included in the project deliverables and in what order this work will be done. Therefore, the Business Case is not window dressing; it is the most important aspect of the project documentation. This only enhances the progress that firms have made in developing their existing project approaches, which use the evaluation of a business case as a gateway to further project work.

Applying AgilePM™ strengthens the investigation of benefits and the establishment of the business need for the project.

As another of my clients has said, AgilePM™ is helping them ensure that there are no ‘vanity’ projects being created, where the project team find a solution that is technically very interesting to them, and then look for a business problem to apply it to!

Another favourite aspect of the agile approach for me is the emphasis on modelling potential project outputs as early in the project lifecycle as possible. So even if you are retaining the names of documents from your existing PRINCE2® approach, the Project Brief should be supplemented with models or prototypes of what is to be created, so that there is an early move from documentation to tangible examples of what we believe the project will create.

## Initiating – Project Initiation Document (PRINCE2®) and Foundations (Business, Management and Solution (AgilePM™))

The Project Initiation Document in PRINCE2® captures the full description of the project. In aligning PRINCE2® with AgilePM™ we can keep the shell of the Project Initiation Document, but inside we need to make some changes.

The first change involves the level of detail included in the Project Plan:

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The Project Initiation Document typically includes a description of all of the features, functions and requirements that have been identified as part of the requirements gathering activities. These requirements are then knitted together into a Project Plan that ensures that all requirements are addressed, and that the project activities are sequenced according to their inter-dependence on each other.

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A key skill for the Project Manager in this planning activity is to identify which activities and outputs are enablers for other activities, to ensure that these are scheduled sufficiently in advance that they can be used later in the project as inputs to further work. There is also an emphasis on finessing the duration of the project by using critical path analysis, to try to ensure that the core activities are undertaken sequentially whilst non-core activities can be moved around to reflect resource availability.

AgilePM™ replaces this planning activity, which is essentially bottom up, from the requirements to the project duration, with a Delivery Plan that starts top down, with the guaranteed delivery date for the project. This timeframe is then broken into chunks known as increments, with each increment broken into several timeboxes. By keeping each section of the project short, it gives a focus to the work that must be done. After all, the major change in emphasis that impacts the planning is the principle of 'deliver on time'.

To achieve this change in emphasis, requirements' gathering is replaced by different questions. Instead of asking users what they want, we concentrate on discovering when they need to have their solution in place by. This means understanding the business priorities, the behaviours and preferences of customers, the demands of regulators and the pressures on senior managers.

The Project Team need to ask:

- When does the business need to be operating in this new way?
- When must the product or service be ready for the market?

Agile project management will never replace the problem of sponsors stating their desired end date for the project in isolation from the work needed to achieve it. In an agile approach, we face this problem head on, accept that the deadline is driven often by market forces and concentrate on what we can achieve in the available time. This helps us to always stay focused on the most valuable aspects of the project, ensuring they are delivered first in every timebox and every increment.

If you are retaining the Project Initiation Document, another change in emphasis is the greater description of the impact of the project on the business, and what the business will look like if the project delivers successfully. This compelling vision of the future is very important for helping to prioritise the work throughout the project. If there is not a clear 'line of sight' between the part of the solution being created and the delivery of this vision of the future, then the project is probably doing the wrong work and needs to prioritise.

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Creation of the agile version of the Project Initiation Document, known in AgilePM™ as the Foundation documents, is that they require the Project Team to ask far harder questions of the business they are collaborating with.

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Effectively we are shifting the work undertaken by our business partners from the end of the project to the beginning. This is because in order to create a solution that can deliver the benefits, there needs to be an excellent understanding of the new business approaches, processes and performance measures established to realise the benefits.

Before we get anywhere near developing the solution an agile approach encourages the preparation of the business for the project deliverables. However, there are barriers to doing this. Often users don't want to make much investment in working out how they will work in future until they have something tangible in front of them.

In some cases, turning the typical project lifecycle on its head and making the creation of new ways of working and implementation plans as the first deliverables of the project has proved an excellent filter for ensuring that projects that users are not really committed to do not get off the ground.



## Controlling a Stage and Managing Product Delivery (PRINCE2®) and Exploration and Engineering and Deployment (AgilePM™)

The engine room of a PRINCE2® project is the stages and the delivery of work packages within them. Again, if this structure exists and all of your non-project professionals have got the idea that there are stages to any project, is it worth disabusing them of this notion?

Stages and increments have a lot in common in that they are short, focused pieces of work, with a review or decision point at the end. In AgilePM™, this decision point has been changed from an evaluation of project progress to deployment of parts of the solution.

The change in emphasis comes from what is tracked and monitored and what is delivered at the end. For example, instead of the End Stage Assessment acting as a verbal progress report from the Project Manager to the Project Board, each increment ends with real delivery to the users. This delivery is either a model or prototype of the solution that they can engage with, or an element of the solution that can be implemented with immediate effect.

Therefore, the questions that the Project Board should ask in agile environment will be about the change readiness of the business and details of how the project deliverables will be implemented, who will take responsibility for it, and for hearing the feedback from the users that will help them decide if further iterations are needed and if so, which ones are the most important.

Another change in an agile environment is a move away from formal reporting of activities completed, replaced by tangible deliverables that all stakeholders can engage with. Reporting is based upon achievement and not 'busyness' which aligns very well with a fast moving business environment where everyone is under pressure. The reality of progress reports is that they often go unread. Instead of sending emails to senior stakeholders, go and meet them and take along some evidence of what the project has created so they can judge for themselves the progress that is being made.

I have had a lot of success in booking 15-30 minutes in the calendar of busy executives, and using the time to walk them through flipcharts or diagrams of what the project has created, or demonstrating apps or screen-shots of what has been developed. This creates lively discussion and often provides me with feedback that can be used to enhance the deliverables.

## Closing a project (PRINCE2®) and Post Project Review (AgilePM™)

AgilePM™ does not have a process for closing the project, as each Deployment is the end of an increment of the project (a little like an End Stage Assessment in PRINCE2®) but concluding with some sort of implementation.

Therefore, whilst you can retain the terminology for closing the project, in an agile approach the emphasis is on benefits realisation and not on lessons learned, as these should have been learnt all of the way through the project.

Also, this is not new to the Project Team or to its stakeholders. There has been an on-going conversation all of the way through the project to understand the benefits that are being delivered as part of every deployment. Lessons learned do not need to be reviewed, as they have been captured and applied at the end of every increment. This is because, with multiple deployments throughout the project lifecycle, up to date feedback and opinions have been solicited and acted upon to create continuous improvement throughout the project.

This makes a lot more sense to me, as I have lost count of the number of PRINCE2® based projects that have never really learnt anything at the end, as everyone is too busy moving onto the next project.

## CONCLUSION

I believe it is important to look for ways to align what we already use to manage our projects with the newer and in my opinion more relevant ideas from AgilePM™.

I know from experience that to become agile requires a big commitment to abandoning detailed project definitions and plans for a more flexible approach. Why muddle up this necessary commitment with unnecessary noise created by changing the names of roles or documents?

I wish you lots of luck as you move towards a more agile approach to project management and I hope it delivers lots of benefits for your organisation.

### About the author



Melanie Franklin has a track record of excellence in project, programme and portfolio planning and delivery. Her career developed from business analyst and junior Project Manager to global head of project and programme management before taking a number of board advisory roles.

She now helps organisations redefine their approach to project management to respond to the increased pace

of change, incorporating elements from a wide range of project methodologies. She draws on her wealth of practical experience to illustrate concepts and to engage her audience in lively debates on advantages and disadvantages of each approach that she outlines.

Melanie is a well-respected keynote speaker and executive coach and is frequently re-appointed by her clients at the end of her assignments to assist with their next challenge.



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