

## Individual reflection: issues and lessons

### 1 Project management approach and perspectives

PRINCE2 techniques were used because templates were provided and PRINCE2 manuals were readily available. However, our project was **not** a PRINCE2 project because I concentrated on coursework deliverables: I did not consider PRINCE2 principles ('PRINCE2iples') (OGC, 2009, pp. 9-14) and themes (OGC, 2009, pp. 15-18), except as imposed by coursework requirements.

Some PRINCE2iples were not followed because the coursework was only the Project Initiation stage, so there was no management by stages and exception<sup>1</sup>. We followed the provided tailoring, with the exception of my decision to write a risk management strategy.

We may have benefitted from an alternative perspective. For example, Portmann (2009) stresses that management products (MPs) are produced to support the project, rather than being important *per se*.

### 2 Major issues during the coursework

#### 2.1 Communication/language barriers, emotions and cultural differences

Neither of my colleagues were native English-speakers. I asked one who seemed particularly reticent whether he felt drowned out and was told 'I am content to listen: I will speak when I have something to say.' Indeed, he contributed a logical framework for our presentation while I and our other colleague had no ideas.

My perception could be better. For example, I didn't immediately understand when a colleague raised many issues whether each required only a simple edit or a large change – I perceived no tacit or spoken clues. Had this colleague not been female, a testosterone-fuelled row may well have occurred.

I became concerned when colleagues consistently didn't respond to emails but this was cured once I'd mentioned my concern. I'm not yet sure whether it stems from my individual personality or my culture.

In a real project, I'd need to be more aware of how and competent at handling emotions and other personal factors. Gareis (2004) is a potential starting point for such learning.

Despite Zeitoun's (1998) list of cultural differences, I didn't notice these affecting our work: Chris and I used Eman's prayer-breaks to 'escape', while Eman's Friday mosque commitments were respected just like any other commitment. I was amazed by Eman's ability to work late, despite her being a parent, but I see that as part of her (and Chris) having the gumption to study in a non-native situation.

#### 2.2 Budget/time

We spent longer than budgeted on the work. This was partly because we needed to study before we could write<sup>2</sup> but rewriting much of our plan in the third week took a long time. From experience, contingency time is almost always needed. I insisted on 10% contingency budget for our plan but should also have implemented it in the coursework.

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<sup>1</sup> Presumably these would have been used if the coursework had included all stages of a project.

<sup>2</sup> Studying time was not included in our time sheets.

## 2.3 Roles

Because we all wanted to learn, in the first week we each created our own versions of the deliverables. Synthesising these, and explaining why facets were included and excluded, took extra time. Instead, we should have immediately allocated roles and tasks, although this probably wouldn't have prevented 'overtime', especially considering the faults pointed out during the last PMB meeting.

I instinctively use a 'first amongst equals' approach – this is my solution to the 'trust trap' (Ellis, 1996). This works with willing colleagues but would have been useless with disruptive or uncooperative colleagues. Time could have been saved if I'd stopped a colleague's stream of issues, but at the potential cost of poorer MPs.

## 3 Management product quality

### 3.1 Length

I write verbosely and should have edited my writing for my colleagues' sakes. I have a tendency to over-plan, contrary to the PRINCE2iples of managing by stages and to agile principles (Beck, et al., 2001).

One of my colleagues wrote significantly shorter MPs. As project manager, I should have been firmer about inclusion of sufficient detail.

### 3.2 Language

Because my colleagues don't write English as I would, I considered copy-editing their contributions. This might have helped the 'board' and me, but would have used more time and may have harmed our team spirit.

### 3.3 Coherence

Our GANTT chart shows six iterations but our Plan has only four. As project manager, I should have seen and dealt with this major discrepancy.

### 3.4 Understanding agile

We started from a poor understanding of agile processes. I conceive of two types of 'agility':

- Macro-agility: re-ordering (and potentially dropping) complete Work Packages (WP) at each milestone. At each milestone, achievement of the subsequent WP would be planned in detail.
- Micro-agility: each WP has its own set of iterations to add and refine features in the products. Requirements within a WP can be trimmed or dropped.

Our submission centred on macro-agility, having fixed-duration iterations each delivering one or more complete products. I am not experienced enough to say whether the two types of agility can be combined or whether this would lead to poor management.

I suspect that having a backlog of story-points (Surdek, 2009), then recording each one achieved, and ensuring that all story-points in a complete product are achieved is a good way forward.

### 3.5 Records management

A benefit from my previous experience was my decision to use a document register and a 'Cubby' online document store. MP dates and version numbers should have been recorded in just one place to prevent inconsistency arising<sup>3</sup>. For a large project or long-lived institution, an easily-accessed EDRM (e.g. Lappin (2012)) would be essential. My colleagues had difficulty using Cubby at first, especially on university PCs. In a real project, even if BYOD, there would be a working system and training. I should have ensured the technology I chose worked for both colleagues and trained them.

## 4 Benefits and lessons

Many issues stemmed from inexperience: such issues should eventually reduce. Personality-based issues are much harder to cure.

Knowing more about PRINCE2 means I can take part in such projects.

Until now, I've been suspicious of almost everything to do with management. However, I'm now persuaded of PRINCE2's benefits – it's a respected, widely used explanation of what to take seriously and how to do so. I intend to use a PRINCE2 process to write my MSc dissertation.

## 5 Works Cited

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<sup>3</sup> They were recorded in the register, MPs' headers and MPs' filenames.