

## PM WORLD TODAY – FEATURED INTERVIEW – JUNE 2008

An Interview with Richard Pharro  
CEO of the APM Group, UK

*Richard Pharro is CEO of the APM Group Ltd, the accreditation body for the UK Office of Government Commerce's (OGC's) Best Practice Portfolio, which includes PRINCE2 and MSP. He trained as a civil engineer and worked on projects in the UK and the Middle East, and was part of the Programme Management team responsible for the re-development of the London Docklands in the 1980s. In the past, he has been a member of the board of delegates for the International Project Management Association (IPMA) and Vice Chairman of the Association for Project Management (APM) in the UK. With colleagues, he has built APM Group into an international organization with offices on all continents specializing in accreditation and certification. Richard is co-author of the book *The Relationship Manager* and is a frequent speaker at conferences. This interview was based on a discussion between Richard Pharro and David Pells, Managing Editor of PM World Today, during the PMAJ International Project & Program Management Symposium in Tokyo, Japan in March 2008. The questions posed below by Pells were answered by Pharro in May.*

**PM World Today (PMWT):** What type of organization is the APM Group? A certification body? A consultancy? What services do you provide?

**Richard Pharro (RP):** The APM Group (APMG) is a global business providing accreditation and certification services. Through its international network of Accredited Consultancy and Training Organizations APMG helps end users develop their professional skills and organizations improve their processes through the adoption of worldwide best practice. APMG is the only organization offering professional qualifications in Programme

and Project management with third party independent accreditation through the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS). APMG works closely with the UK Office of Government Commerce (OGC) and TSO (The Stationery Office Ltd), their official publisher in running global accreditation schemes in PRINCE2™, MSP (Managing Successful Programmes), M\_o\_R® (Management Of Risk) and ITIL® (IT Infrastructure Library).

Other partners include The Association of Proposal Management Professionals (APMP) and the UK's Chartered Management Institute.

**PMWT:** What is your relationship with the Organization for Government Commerce (OGC)?

**RP:** OGC is the owner of PRINCE2™, MSP (Managing Successful Programmes), M\_o\_R® (Management Of Risk) and ITIL. We act as their accreditor. This means we accredit training organizations to deliver programmes around the methods and we set and mark examinations. It is our responsibility to ensure the widest possible take up of examinations around the world. The APM Group (APMG) is the Certification Body and is responsible for the running of examinations and accreditation of training organizations (ATOs), trainers, consulting organizations (ACOs) and consultants.

**PMWT:** What is PRINCE2 exactly? Is it a project management guide, a standard, a process or what?

**RP:** PRINCE2, Projects in Controlled Environments, is a widely used project management method, which navigates you through all the essentials for running a successful project. Since its introduction in 1989 as a government standard for IT project management, PRINCE2 has been taken on by both the public and private sectors and is now recognized as a de facto standard for project management. PRINCE2 (P2 was never designed for IT projects, PRINCE was used for IT projects) is a flexible method and is applicable for all types of project. PRINCE2 takes all the simple and obvious lessons learned by thousands of professionals in the past 20-odd years and presents them in a clear set of processes for present clients, managers and their teams. OGC (Office of Government Commerce) own the methodology.

PRINCE2 is recognized as a world-class international product and is the standard method for project management, not least because it embodies many years of good practice in project management and provides a flexible and adaptable approach to suit all projects. It is a project management method designed to provide a framework covering the wide variety of disciplines and activities required within a project. The focus throughout PRINCE2 is on the Business Case, which describes the rationale and business justification for the project. The Business Case drives all the project management processes, from initial project set-up through to successful finish.

**PMWT:** Can you please provide a little bit about the history of PRINCE2?

**RP:** PRINCE was first developed by the UK government in 1989 as the standard approach to IT project management for central government. Since then, the method has been enhanced to become a generic, best practice approach suitable for the management of all types of projects, and has a proven record outside both IT and government sectors. PRINCE2 has been widely adopted and adapted by both the public and private sectors and is now the UK's de facto standard for project management. There is also a rapidly growing international interest. PRINCE2 is designed to incorporate the requirements and experiences of existing users around the world.

**PMWT:** How does APM Group certify PRINCE2 users or organizations? What does a PRINCE2 certification mean?

**RP:** We are the awarding body for the PRINCE2 exams so we mark papers and issue certificates. We also accredit consultants who can assess how well organizations have embedded PRINCE2 in their organizations. These consultants work with a Maturity Model developed by OGC. The Model provides organizations with a level of maturity and gives guidance on how they can improve their PRINCE2 capabilities. OGC do not keep a record of all companies who use PRINCE2. However if you wish to contact other users of the framework you can do this via the Best Practice User Group (BPUG): [www.usergroup.org.uk](http://www.usergroup.org.uk)

**PMWT:** I understand that PRINCE2 has become quite popular in the UK and is spreading rapidly in Europe. Can you provide us with some idea of where it is gaining acceptance and how many users or certifications there are worldwide?

**RP:** Over 250,000 people have taken a PRINCE2 foundation exam; 200,000 have taken the Practitioner. Exams are available in nine languages including Mandarin, Chinese (Mandarin), Danish, Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Polish, and Spanish. (Castilian). Exams have been taken in the UK and 56 other countries.

**PMWT:** What about MSP, the OGC's program management standard? What does that entail?

**RP:** MSP allows users to consistently manage a huge variety of programmes so they deliver quality outcomes and lasting benefits. Fusing leadership with management best practice, MSP enables organizations to coordinate their key functions, develop a clear sense of unity and purpose and achieve the strategic cohesion necessary to drive through effective change.

**PMWT:** What is the history of the MSP guide? Was that also entirely developed by OGC?

**RP:** Yes, MSP was entirely developed by OGC. In 2007 it was extensively updated and revised. The new MSP manual reflects the latest changes and developments in best practice along with practical advice. It has a simplified structure and new layout highlighting the guidance's key themes.

The key 2007 changes cover: a clearer distinction between programmes and projects; programmes in the context of the overall portfolio of business change; benefits realization; governance; transformation of the business and transition to operations; stakeholders; leadership; competencies and behaviors.

**PMWT:** Do PRINCE2 users generally step up to MSP, or is this addressed to a whole different set of users and stakeholders?

**RP:** PRINCE2 and MSP are distinct because while projects deliver outputs. Programme management is concerned with the benefits, dealing with business as usual and the wider context of interdependencies.

**PMWT:** Is there also a certification for MSP? How many certified users are there now for this program management approach?

**RP:** There are three levels of MSP certification: Foundation, Practitioner and advanced Practitioner. There are about 10% the number of PRINCE2 candidates for MSP, but this is increasing all the time.

**PMWT:** What is the current status of PRINCE2 and MSP? Are there updated versions due out or are the versions on the street the ones to use for the foreseeable future?

**RP:** MSP was updated in 2007. PRINCE2 is undergoing its refresh cycle at the moment and a new version is due out in the middle of 2009.

**PMWT:** How big is the APM Group? How many people and offices? Where are you located?

**RP:** APMG is headquartered in the UK. We have 50 full time staff and over 100 associates. We also have offices in China, Australia, Germany, Benelux, and the US. We are hoping to open offices in Japan, Germany and Scandinavia in the near future, and India in the longer term.

**PMWT:** How did APM Group get started?

**RP:** I established The APM Group Limited in partnership with the Association of Project Management in 1993. The Association disposed of their stake in The APM Group in April 2000 and since then it has been a private company.

**PMWT:** I understand that Alan Harpham is Managing Director for the APM Group. I have known Alan for many years; he's a very senior level and experienced project manager. How did the two of you get together?

**RP:** Alan is actually Chairman of APMG. We knew each other through the Association of Project Management. In 1996 Alan was considering a portfolio career so I invited him to become Chairman of APMG. Since then he has chaired the board and being involved in a lot of our International activity.

**PMWT:** What about your own background? How many years have you been involved in project or program management? What kinds of project have you worked on, and in what industries?

**RP:** I am a chartered Civil Engineer and have worked projects in the UK and the Middle East. I spent several years with the London Docklands Development Corporation on the regeneration of East London. As the Vice Chairman of APM, in 1989 I developed the Association's Certification Programme for experienced Project Managers and led the first International Certification Committee on behalf of the International Project Management Association (IPMA). I am a non executive Director of the Best Practice User Group and have contributed chapters to several books. I also co authored The Relationship Manager – The Next Generation of Project Management, which was published by Gower in January, 2003.

**PMWT:** What is the Best Practice Users Group, which I think was launched last year? Is this an APM Group initiative, a non-profit or something sponsored by OGC?

**RP:** Best Practice User Group™ is a user group for people using OGC methods. Its mission is to help users adopt, use, share and shape the application of OGC PPM Products. It does this via discussion groups and events, and members are asked for their opinions on OGC guidance. When refreshes are underway, the OGC asks members to sit on reference groups so they can understand the needs and opinions of users.

In February 2007, BPUG organized a large scale conference in London for both members and non-members of BPUG. The objective of the event was to help end users but also to raise BPUG's profile. APMG was a headline sponsor of the event.

**PMWT:** I understand the BPUG 2008 Congress held in February in London was highly successful. Have you any comments or reflections about that event? Was it the first one and will this be an annual conference?

**RP:** I hope it will be an annual conference, although ultimately that decision lies with BPUG. Plans are certainly underway for 2009. I think any event which encourages senior users to come and share their experience is valuable. The event was also enjoyable as it is always a bonus to be able to spend some time with associates from across the industry, and to meet new people working with risks, programmes and projects.

**PMWT:** Have you any other big events coming up in 2008.

**RP:** We are hosting and attending lots of events in 2008.

We are hosting The Best Practice Showcase on June 24<sup>th</sup> in London:  
[www.bestpracticeshowcase.com](http://www.bestpracticeshowcase.com)

Later on in the year we will be running a PRINCE2 workshop on October 9<sup>th</sup>, in Birmingham, UK.

On December 4<sup>th</sup> we're running a seminar on MSP in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Events we are attending:

- In September we'll have a booth at the itSMF Congress in San Francisco from September 7-11.
- In October we'll have a booth at the PMI Global Congress in Denver from 18-21 October.
- In November we will be at the IPMA World Congress, to be held in Rome from 9-11 November.

For additional information about APM Group, PRINCE2 or MSP, visit  
[www.apmgroup.co.uk](http://www.apmgroup.co.uk) or [www.best-management-practice.co.uk](http://www.best-management-practice.co.uk).