

## TIPS & TECHNIQUES

# Positioning PRINCE2™ in an Unforgiving Business World

*By Dayo Sowunmi*

### **Introduction**

The objective of this paper is to provide the project management practitioner with some practical advice on ways to gain business approval of PRINCE2. This paper focuses on practical methods to 'sell' PRINCE2 to senior management, particularly in an environment where a number of past projects have failed or were closed prematurely.

When a project fails, how do you separate the methodology from its implementation? Quite often the project management methodology is blamed for the failed project, making it more difficult to recommend the methodology for future projects. This reaction is similar to throwing out the proverbial baby with the bath water.

There is a real challenge in trying to re-introduce a project management methodology after it has been applied on a failed project. The business world is often quick to condemn and slow to forget.

### **Why Projects Fail**

In reality project failure (or premature closure) is quite often the result of a number of factors:

- changes in a business's strategic direction
- lack of senior management support and commitment
- lack of commitment from project team members
- poor selection of project team and board members
- unrealistic delivery timeframes and expectations
- lack of project management experience

So how does a project management practitioner go about positioning PRINCE2 in an unforgiving business world?

### **Positioning PRINCE2**

One of my colleagues convinced their senior managers to attend the PRINCE2 Foundation course. They found the course very enlightening, and it gave them a chance to network and hear about success stories from participants and the course facilitator. They were more receptive to adopting

PRINCE2 after attending the course. I believe that the multiple-choice style examination, in contrast to the written Practitioner exam, also played a part in convincing the senior managers to attend the Foundation course.

In my experience the project start-up process is arguably the most critical factor that determines whether a project will fail or succeed. Nothing much can be achieved without a valid Business Case and the attendant executive commitment. Applying key performance indicators that are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-based) will facilitate successful project execution and realisation of business benefits.

The PRINCE2 impact analysis method, together with other methods such as SWOT and PESTLE, also come in handy when discussing internal and external factors that impact an organisation. SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and PESTLE for political, economical, sociological, technological, legal and environmental.

Exposing executives and senior management to catchy acronyms works well and resonates with them. Executives and senior management are thus able to communicate in 'project-speak', giving them the view that they have expertise in the area, in addition to their usual field of expertise.

Another approach to get executives and senior management on side is to build a case for applying a standard project management methodology across the organisation. The project management practitioner conducts research into the organisation's use of standards in areas like risk, quality, business processes, etc.

The intention of this research is to determine the organisation's propensity to adopt standard methodologies. If the outcome of the research efforts is favourable, the project management practitioner is then able to promote the case for adopting a standard methodology like PRINCE2.

One other approach is to adopt the good old 'change management' techniques, where nominated senior managers act as advocates, change champions/agents within the organisation to 'sell' PRINCE2.

### **Making the Business Understand**

Risk is a familiar concept in the business world. Business owners are regularly finding ways to minimise, avoid or transfer risk in their daily activities. Therefore, risk management resonates well with the business community. PRINCE2 goes a long way in addressing risk in project management. By emphasizing PRINCE2's management of risk, the project management practitioner will reinforce the advantages of adopting the methodology.

Further, by practising PRINCE2's management by exception the project management practitioner is telling the executives that they realise their time is important and will only be required if things deviate from the Project Plan. Executives like to know that other people are aware that their time is precious.

PRINCE2's control mechanisms facilitate communication between the project management practitioner and executives. Communication Plans serve as a good tool to manage business involvement, commitment and input. Use of a Communication Plan clearly demonstrates that some thought has been put into the project execution regime, together with providing avenues for communicating project status to the executives.

### **Dichotomy between Project Management and Business**

It's important for project management practitioners to recognise the dichotomy between them and business senior executives. This is most evident in terms of typical thought processes for both groups. I don't want to paint a negative picture of the business world, seeing as I am a business owner. I am also a practising project manager. As a result, I have to see things from the business perspective as well as from the project manager's perspective. There is clearly a dichotomy between the two worlds.

I have had instances where my business side has questioned decisions made by my project management side and vice versa, depending on which 'hat' I was wearing at the time. However, before I run off to a therapist complaining of a multiple personality disorder, it is best to examine what drives each side. My project management side is driven by the familiar six tenets: scope, benefit, resources, quality, time and risk. Typically, with project management there is a clear starting point and target. The emphasis is at the departmental level and relates to execution of set tasks.

On the other hand, my business side is driven by that old cliché, the bottom line. There are other factors that come into play: big-picture strategic thinking, risk management, long-term business goals and vision. The emphasis is at the corporate level and is more abstract.

The dichotomy between project management and business can be summed up as follows: the project management side focuses on getting the job done, while the business side focuses on ensuring there will be jobs to get done. Both sets of drivers are not necessarily mutually exclusive. However, they do not always co-exist comfortably. For example, I recall a situation where I was wearing my project manager hat in an End Stage meeting with a client's Project Board. One of the board members wanted to know why my company had submitted a time-and-resources contract on this occasion rather than a fixed-cost contract. This occurred about a quarter of the way into the project. The project manager in me would have said something like 'This particular project relies heavily on your staff being available for business requirements

definition and testing, and therefore it is difficult to fix how much of our time will be spent with your people.'

I realised I was dealing with business-minded people and needed to put on my business hat very quickly.

After a brief pause I explained that the contract was written specifically for this project, that my company was fully committed to achieving the client's business goals, and we were showing this commitment by making our people available as and when required by their people. In other words, 'you only pay for what you use'.

I doubt whether my project manager's answer, while factually correct, would have resonated well with the Project Board.

As it turned out, my *business* answer was well received, which came as a small shock to me. I was gearing up for what could easily have turned into a minor client management situation. Thankfully, that was averted in this case. I have learnt some things through regularly switching between project management and business focus. Open communication and empathy go a long way towards bridging the gap between both sides.

Empathy in this case is not so much sympathy or compassion as the ability to see things from someone else's perspective and the ability to present information in a language and style they prefer. This can be very difficult to manage, especially where the other person's perspective is in direct contrast to yours. It is almost as if you have to mentally separate yourself from the words coming out of your mouth.

While all this may sound rather difficult, I would like to end on a happy note. It makes your job as a project management practitioner a lot easier when you are conscious of these differences and can make the separation. As a further comfort, it is helpful to realise that you are simply packaging information with a different bias from your own. The facts have not changed – what has changed is the inevitable and attendant bias around the facts. Remember that people tend to be more receptive when you 'speak their language' and you show that you appreciate what they have gone through to get to where they are.

### **About PRINCE2™**

PRINCE2™ is a written description of how to manage a project in a logical, organised way, following defined steps. It is not a tool or a technique but a structured project management process. It is an easily tailored and scalable method that can be applied to all varieties of projects and situations. Owned by the UK Office of Government Commerce, and launched in its current version in 1996, PRINCE2 is not only the UK's de facto standard process for all types of projects but is now rapidly becoming an international standard,

with organisations around the world using it as their preferred approach to managing projects. For more information visit [www.prince2.org.uk](http://www.prince2.org.uk)

#### About the Author:



*Dayo Sowunmi*



Dayo Sowunmi is Managing Director of The Anode Group Pty Ltd, based in Melbourne, Australia. The company provides knowledge-based marketing services, tailored database marketing tools and software applications. For further information email: [dayos@anode.com](mailto:dayos@anode.com)