

VIEWPOINT – DECEMBER 2007
Is Best Practice always identical with
the best project management?

By Morten Fangel

At the IPMA Congress, which was held in Krakow in June, the title of the last plenary speech was: *Is Best Practice Always Appropriate?* The speaker was Peter Morris from Great Britain, already a well-known speaker in the 80s when we organised an IPMA Congress in Copenhagen. During the intervening years, Peter Morris has served as Chairman for the British Association of Project Management (APM), has edited APM's *Body of Knowledge* on project management - and is also a professor and consultant in project management.

The starting point of his speech postulated that *Best Practice* principles are often discussed and accepted as standardised guidelines within project management circles. Among the highest profile examples he mentioned were PRINCE2 and *PMI's Body of Knowledge* (abbreviated PMBOK).

"But, is practised project management always identical?" Peter Morris asked. "Is *Best Practice* always the most suitable? When could it be appropriate to break the rules? And who is it anyhow who defines *Best Practice*?"

His speech led me to reflect on the fact that we frequently – in connection with preparation and examinations for IPMA Certification – include questions which indicate to candidates that IPMA Certification is considered to be in line with the examinations based on PRINCE2 and PMBOK, respectively. And frequently the candidates are surprised to find that IPMA Certification is quite different.

It is our opinion that PRINCE2 and PMBOK are two solid and carefully worked-out descriptions of *Best Practice* – each of them demonstrating a well-defined perception of the most important aspects of project management. And their related examinations verify whether good insight into the methods in questions of *Best Practice* has been achieved.

It is right to argue that many descriptions of *Best Practice* reflect a "closed system way of thinking". In contrast, IPMA Certification demonstrates an "open system way of thinking". Here we are able to recognise all good contributions toward the creation of competencies in project management. It is an extra plus if a candidate can document knowledge of PRINCE2, PMBOK or other expressions of *Best Practice*.

The important elements of an IPMA Certification are realised when the candidate demonstrates his/her performance of competent project management - including leadership behaviour, methods application and experience application.

There is another aspect which, in our opinion, further contributes to establishing IPMA Certification as a kind of "umbrella" for the various forms of examinations in project

management. This aspect is the fact that IPMA Certification's places special stress on a demonstration of *competencies* sufficient to lead the managing of projects.

Also notable is the way that we in the Scandinavian countries exercise IPMA Certification with focus on candidates' competencies to evaluate the extent and scope of management which is necessary in a project and during the project process. Of course this is with due respect to the company's requirements for reporting - and the application of relevant forms of *Best Practice*.

A candidate should be able to use the best from the specific *Best Practice* models and apply them to generate a wide spectrum of ideas and solutions for the project in question.

And then we continue with points from Peter Morris' speech in Krakow:

Attaining professional status in project management requires being informed and being reflective. *Best Practice* models have their weaknesses – not least because the conditions and success/failure standards for projects are becoming ever more complex. For this reason, it is now time to urge caution against blindly following standards

A Project Management Professional operates using his/her knowledge of different forms for *Best Practice* – but is also able to make the critical choices of necessary tools and methods and deal with the shifting requirements connected with management of a current project. That is the definition of being a *Project Management Professional!*

This was the conclusion presented in Peter Morris' speech. It is interesting that we in Scandinavia are already well along the road of putting this statement into practice – by also focusing on competencies in "leadership management", including abilities to plan and evaluate project management. For discussion of this aspect, see also "*Competencies in Project Management*" issued by the Scandinavian Project Management Associations.

We do not neglect the precondition that we consider professionally the various inputs from *Best Practice* models.

*Morten Fangel**Author*

Morten Fangel is Managing Director and Chief Consultant of Fangel Consultants Ltd., Saettedammen 4, DK-3400 Hilleroed / Copenhagen, Denmark. He is also the founder of the Association of Danish Project Management, of which he today is the Executive Director. Morten is a member of the Association of Danish Project Management and four other Nordic Associations, the International Project Management Association (IPMA), the Project Management Institute (PMI ®) and the Association of Certified Management Consultants (CMC). He is former president, past Chair and an Honorary Fellow of IPMA, and an honorary member of the Icelandic Project Management Association. Morten Fangel holds a Masters of Science degree in Civil Engineering, and Ph.D. in industrial research from the Technical University of Denmark and a Diploma in Economics degree from the Copenhagen Business School. After years in consulting Engineering companies, he founded Fangel Consultants Ltd., from where he has more than two decades of experience in management consulting. Morten Fangel has introduced and is a specialist in methodologies for project preparation and start-up, and for planning and evaluation of project management. He also teaches advanced project management seminars for IPMA. Morten can be reached at morten@fangel.dk.