

Yo-Yo dieting and choosing the latest management fashions have much in common: they are unlikely to making a lasting impression. Adrian Dooley used this food analogy last month to help describe why the reasons for project failures haven't change in many years and why a piecemeal approach to solving them is doomed to failure. This month he argues that the solution needs to be seen as a jigsaw in which all the pieces are needed.



The project management jigsaw

By Adrian Dooley, director, The Projects Group

Last month I introduced the idea that putting together an effective project delivery organisation was a matter of getting things right in four areas: people, methods, projects and environment.

These areas all overlap and intermingle. Separating them out is always going to be somewhat artificial, but it's a convenient way to explore the issues as long as we don't get too hung up on the detail.

This big picture can be built out of a series of jigsaw pieces. A governance framework in the 'Right environment' area, or a competency framework in the 'Right people' area, could, for example, each be pieces of the jigsaw. A jigsaw piece could also be an organisational construct like a community of practice; an intangible principle such as 'Professionalism'; or a physical product such as a software tool.

The point is that all of these things need to come together and fit seamlessly like jigsaw pieces to create the high performing organization. One last aspect of the jigsaw analogy is important. Imagine a jigsaw piece sitting on your highly polished table. You gently rest a finger on it and can push it in any direction with a minimum of effort – it isn't stable and many external factors could move it around. Now imagine that same jigsaw piece as something that is linked into its proper place in a 500-piece jigsaw. Now it won't move. Every part of the jigsaw not only contributes its own unique part of the big picture, it also makes sure that all the pieces retain their position and the picture is stable.

So it is with the project management jigsaw. The fads of the last 40 years have often been implemented in isolation. Competency frameworks without career planning; knowledge-based qualifications without competency development; and (the one I will address in this article) process models without tools and techniques.

Individually, such initiatives are rarely more than a passing phase. I often see invitations to tender for consultancy, or training, where

the organization appears to be asking for something they first requested many years ago. So didn't it work? The answer is invariably that the earlier initiatives were like the isolated jigsaw piece and didn't stand the test of time.

Senior managers come and go, departments are re-organised and good work is done to implement a few of the jigsaw pieces, but eventually it all evaporates and passes into memory as the organisation reverts to type.

Increasingly, I see the word 'embed' creeping into ITTs for project management professional services. Organizations want to make sure that change is embedded into normal practice. They are fed up with initiatives that only improve project delivery in the short term. The new, effective practices do not make the transition to being 'the way we do things around here'. You may implement a new piece of project control software; perform a comprehensive training needs analysis; or develop new processes for risk management, but these do not become 'embedded' in the organization's normal business if they are implemented in isolation. Going back to the analogy in the previous article, these are the short-lived fad diets. Ultimately, successful weight loss depends upon a sustainable and permanent change in lifestyle.

Picking the pieces

You may be wondering what an area of the jigsaw might look like, so I'm going to start building the picture in the 'Right methods' area. This is probably the most well-defined and documented part of project management. Along with the 'Right projects' area, 'Right methods' defines the discipline of project management. The other two circles 'Right people' and 'Right environment' define the profession of project management. The discipline describes what project management is and the profession describes its practitioners and how they apply the discipline.

Before I descend into the detail, think about this

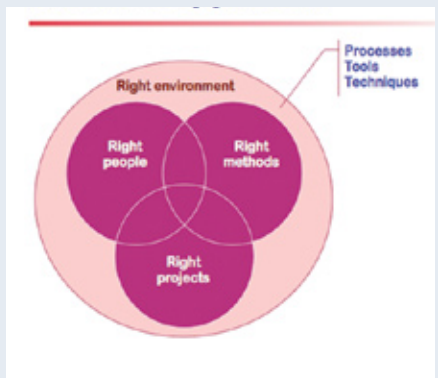
unattributed quotation that a colleague once told me:

'Before Man learned to fly all flying machines looked different; once Man had learned to fly, they all looked the same.'

Project management is generously populated with people who get hung up on one particular flavour of project management, or believe that one particular approach is the answer to any problem to the exclusion of all others.

I have no interest in whether the Boeing 747 is a much better plane than the Airbus 380, or vice versa (I might not have even got the names right). As far as I'm concerned, they look pretty much the same. They both have a fuselage, wings and engines and as long as they get me to my destination in relative comfort I have no interest in the detailed differences. So it is with many of the various proprietary jigsaw pieces that we can potentially use to build our simple, but complete, picture of project management.

I am going to use the Association for Project Management's Body of Knowledge and PRINCE2 to illustrate two things: firstly, as an example of isolated, and ultimately doomed, project management initiatives, and secondly as an example of how readily available jigsaw pieces can be trimmed and filed to fit together.



Right methods

First of all I should explain what I mean by 'methods' – or perhaps what I don't mean. What I don't mean is methodologies.

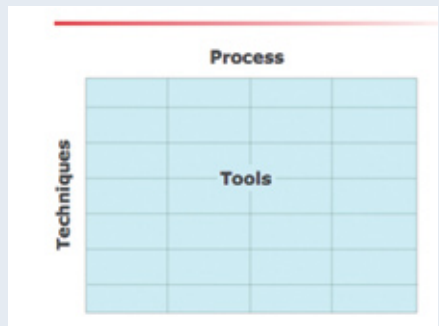
The methods part of the picture covers processes (eg, a process for managing risk), tools (eg, scheduling software or document templates) and techniques (eg, Critical Path or Earned Value). Incidentally, as an aside, my dictionary¹ defines a technique as 'a mechanical skill in an art', neatly summarising the 'is project management an art or a science?' debate – it's clearly a combination of both.

The good news is that all the pieces of the jigsaw are well known and documented. The bad news is that they don't always fit without a bit of work.

It is with some trepidation that I now consider specific documents and products. I know devotees of one or another will take detailed issue with my analysis, often fairly, but at this stage I'm more interested in just putting something together that

flies rather than worrying about the fine detail.

The Project Management Institute (PMI) in the USA publishes the PMBoK Guide² from which we can derive a very simple but effective construct. 'Methods' is made up of a matrix of processes and techniques. The PMBoK Guide calls these Process Groups and Knowledge Areas respectively – but what's in a name?



In the UK we have the Association for Project Management's Body of Knowledge (APM BoK), which is predominantly about techniques, and PRINCE2, from the OGC, which is primarily focused on process. The APM BoK is much broader in its coverage of techniques than the PMBoK Guide and PRINCE2 is a much more robust process model that includes more detailed tools than the PMBoK Guide. There are other reasons why I would choose to start building my big picture using the APM BoK and PRINCE2 as pieces rather than the PMBoK but that is for another day.

PRINCE2 is the all-pervasive process model in the UK and is pretty popular around the world. I am always aware that it is a bit of a Marmite product that tends to polarise opinion. In its defence I would say two things. Firstly, once you scratch away the surface it's no different to any other process model (including the PMBoK Guide, or the many in-house models I have seen in large organisations) and secondly, the reason it sometimes fails is because people who adopt it forget you need the techniques as well as the process (not to mention the many other bits of the jigsaw). That's where the APM BoK comes in. By arranging the PRINCE2 process model as a lifecycle we have one side of the matrix. Topics from the APM BoK then form the other side of the matrix. I have just shown six of the 52 topics that make up the APM BoK to illustrate the point.

Techniques	Process			
	Starting up a project	Initiating a project	Controlling a stage	Closing a project
Requirements management			Managing stage boundaries	Managing product delivery
Value management			Tools	
Estimating				
Scheduling	Milestone plan	Critical Path	Slip charts	
Teamwork				
Conflict management				

outweigh the compromises that adherents to any particular piece of the jigsaw may have to make.

1 Concise Oxford Dictionary
2 Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge published by the Project Management Institute