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W H I T E P A P E R

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# APPLYING BEST PRACTICE FOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT SUCCESS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Individuals and organisations are looking to adopt Best Practice to succeed in project and programme management. Achieving Best Practice starts with adopting and adapting the standards set out by international project management industry bodies, including those defined by AXELOS Limited, the Association for Project Management (APM), and internationally, the Project Management Institute (PMI®).

Any organisation, in any sector, at any level of maturity can tap into this body of Best Practice resources. Projects of all sizes and all types share many similar characteristics and Best Practice truly has something for everyone.

This whitepaper looks at where organisations can start the process of embedding Best Practices and how to address some of the common barriers to adoption, with some practical tips and points to consider.

## WHERE TO START ?

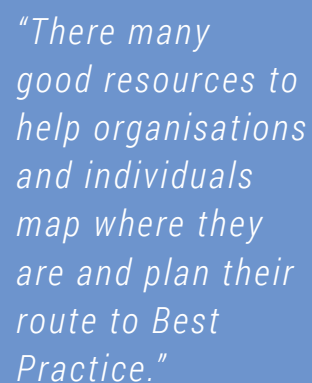
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It is not advisable to try to implement all the aspects of Best Practice at once. That is like trying to boil the ocean. The key is to identify starting points for you or your organisation. There are many good resources out there to help organisations and individuals map where they are now and plan their route to Best Practice.

For individuals, The APM competence framework allows people to not only map their competencies against Best Practice but also illustrates what Best Practice should look like in 47 separate project management competencies, from technical competencies like change control to behavioural aspects like leadership.

For an organisation, a Maturity assessment is a key starting point. The global standard for maturity assessment is the Portfolio, Programme and Project Management Maturity Model (P3M3®). This five-level maturity model can help an organisation looking to improve by determining the dominant characteristics in its project delivery. This will involve core aspects of project management including risk management, financial management and resource management.

Alongside its diagnostic capabilities P3M3 contains a number of models and suggestions that describe higher-level capability, providing a route map for maturing organisations to follow. Self-assessment can be a low-cost first step which can then be supplemented by external consultancy for an impartial perspective.

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*“There many good resources to help organisations and individuals map where they are and plan their route to Best Practice.”*

## ADDRESSING MULTIGENERATIONAL NEEDS

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A single approach to implementing Best Practice will not fit all organisations. Flexibility is important to address the requirements of people with a different range of experiences.

For example, while it is vital to map desired competencies to existing skills and abilities, it is important to avoid sticking rigidly to textbook definitions, acknowledging real world skills. An individual with lots of experience might have the highest level of knowledge in the organisation about project management – the fact they do not have a classroom credential is less relevant.

One client had a number of longstanding staff whose experience was significantly more developed than their paper qualifications would suggest. The APM Competence Framework was a helpful tool for them to use when developing their capability because, crucially, the APM framework integrates both knowledge of a topic and practical experience gained in delivery environments. When profiling their teams they could take account of experience as well as qualifications.

In a multi-generational environment there may be a number of senior people close to retirement. It is important that their business knowledge and insight is institutionalised and does not leave the business with them. One of the most effective ways of doing that is to focus on developing a coaching and mentoring programme so that younger less experienced workers are exposed to Best Practice through mentoring as well as formal training.

Blended learning, combining classroom training and e-learning, may be a complementary approach that addresses the formal learning aspect whilst working in harmony with the mentoring needs of a multi-generational workforce.

*“A single approach to implementing Best Practice will not fit all organisations. Flexibility is important when trying to address the requirements of people with a different range of experiences.”*



## BARRIERS TO ADOPTION

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The Best Practice approach to projects and programmes brings many benefits but organisations should prepare to address barriers to adoption:

- ✓ **"Not invented here!"** In many organisations influential stakeholders will use this tactic to resist the introduction of Best Practice simply on the grounds that they or the solution developed elsewhere will not reflect the complex nature of their own business – so therefore it must have limited value. How to overcome this barrier: To get people onside, use existing systems and terminology that already work – don't throw the baby out with the bath water. The aim is to develop a common language using existing conventions, as long as the existing tools can be aligned with best-practice principles.
- ✓ **"We already do that"** This is a common response. In regulated industries where standard operating procedures proliferate, they will already comply with documented standards which may appear to offer comparable controls. However, the devil is in the detail and you must be ready to challenge these assumptions. Best Practice demands progress reporting, for example, but a regular meeting to discuss issues may not meet the required reporting formality that is missing and which is the critical factor to achieve better control and improve project outcomes. If you allow people to say "we already do that" and it goes unchallenged the expected improvement may not materialise. How to overcome this barrier: It is vital to understand the whole picture. When you hear the assertion "we already do that" then get the perspective of other stakeholders and to provide documentary evidence. Directors may have a different view from project managers, for example.
- ✓ **Cultural barrier.** Different cultures have different approaches to project management. Management in some regions depend more heavily on discussion to reach a consensual approach. In this type of culture managers aiming to introduce Best Practice will have to consider carefully how to incorporate written documentation. Elsewhere there is a cultural focus on written documentation as a focus of decision-making. How to overcome this barrier: Empowered and influential leadership, not only at the very top but also throughout the organisation, is key. Target and win over leaders who have the respect of their peers so that they can model the behaviours that the organisation wants to embed. Local conventions. When multinational organisations or enterprises engaged in merger and acquisition activities are putting in Best Practice frameworks across territories, each local area will have its own way of doing things. There may be many different ways of accounting for project spend. It is a matter of urgency to unify this before attempting to introduce an overarching project management framework. How to overcome this barrier: Develop models and highlevel Best Practice principles that people can refer to for local governance. Local champions are useful here too but the key is to have a single version of the truth for reference.
- ✓ **What is in for me?** People are reluctant to change. Individual project managers may not necessarily see any personal benefit from the introduction of a project management framework, which may bring with them an expectation of a higher workload, more accountability and more visibility. How to overcome this barrier: Focus on the benefits relating to the business drivers for bringing in Best Practice. Make sure staff understand the need to change behaviours. Motivate staff to ask themselves, what will happen if we do nothing? What is the personal or local impact of continuing as we are? This might range from job losses if there is no change to – more positively – getting to do more projects that we are good at and fixing common failings and frustrations.



## ABOUT ILX GROUP (ILX)



**ILX Group** is a global all-in-one provider of Best Practice Learning Solutions. **ILX** delivers Portfolio Programme & Project Management, IT Service Management, Risk Management and Business Financial Literacy learning solutions. The Best Practice courses are delivered through a blend of classroom, workshops, e-Learning and mobile platforms.

**ILX** is a market leader in **PRINCE2®** training and has provided Best Practice learning to more than 250,000 people across 5,000 organisations in over 100 countries. **ILX** works closely with its clients to deliver industry standard qualifications and helps organisations to deliver continuous workforce improvement. The company and its multi-lingual trainers can support customers around the world with local offices also in the UK, Middle East, India, Australia and New Zealand.

For further information visit [www.ilxgroup.com](http://www.ilxgroup.com) or follow ILX on [Twitter@ILXGroup](https://twitter.com/ILXGroup), or Facebook [www.facebook.com/ILXGroup](https://www.facebook.com/ILXGroup).

## REFERENCES

- AXELOS® is a registered trade mark of AXELOS Limited
- P3M3® is a registered trade mark of AXELOS Limited
- PMI is a registered mark of the Project Management Institute, Inc.