

# A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (The PMBOK® Guide)

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(A book review by R. Max Wideman, FPMI)

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## *Introduction*

This "book" *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge* (PMBOK® Guide) is in fact the second part of the dual publication – the all in one, which was first introduced with Book [A] last month. This second part, which I refer to as Book [B], is much larger than Book [A] and, according to the cover of the whole dual publication, is the Seventh Edition. Also, as I noted last month, this Book [B] has its own Table of Contents, its own separate set of page numbers and its own bright red cover page.

So, here are my Book Review comments on Book [B]: *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge*, otherwise referred to as the *PMBOK Guide* or just *The Guide*.

Since the publication's cover pronounces this Guide as the *Seventh Edition*, it is clear that it is intended as a replacement of all previous editions. The total number of pages of this Guide, including various appendices and index, etc., is 274 pages. This is a welcome change from previous guides that carried some 900 pages. To achieve this, Book [B] has been completely rewritten, but on substantially different subject matter. I will discuss more on this travesty later.

As the *Introduction* tells us:<sup>1</sup>

"This section describes important information about *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge* (PMBOK® Guide) – Seventh Edition. It describes the relationships of the PMBOK® Guide to *The Standard for Project Management*,<sup>2</sup> changes to the PMBOK® Guide, the relationship to PMStandards+™ (PMI's digital platform for standards), and provides a brief overview of the content.

### 1.1 STRUCTURE OF THE PMBOK® GUIDE

In addition to this introduction, this edition of the *PMBOK® GUIDE* contains three sections:

- **Section 2 Project Performance Domains.** This section identified and describes eight project performance domains that form an integrated system to enable successful delivery of the project and intended outcomes.
- **Section 3 Tailoring.** This section describes what tailoring is, and presents an overview of what to tailor and how to go about tailoring individual projects.
- **Section 4 Models, Methods, and Artifacts.** This section presents a brief description of commonly used models, methods, and artifacts. These models illustrate the range of options that project teams can use to produce deliverables, organize work, and enable communication and collaboration."

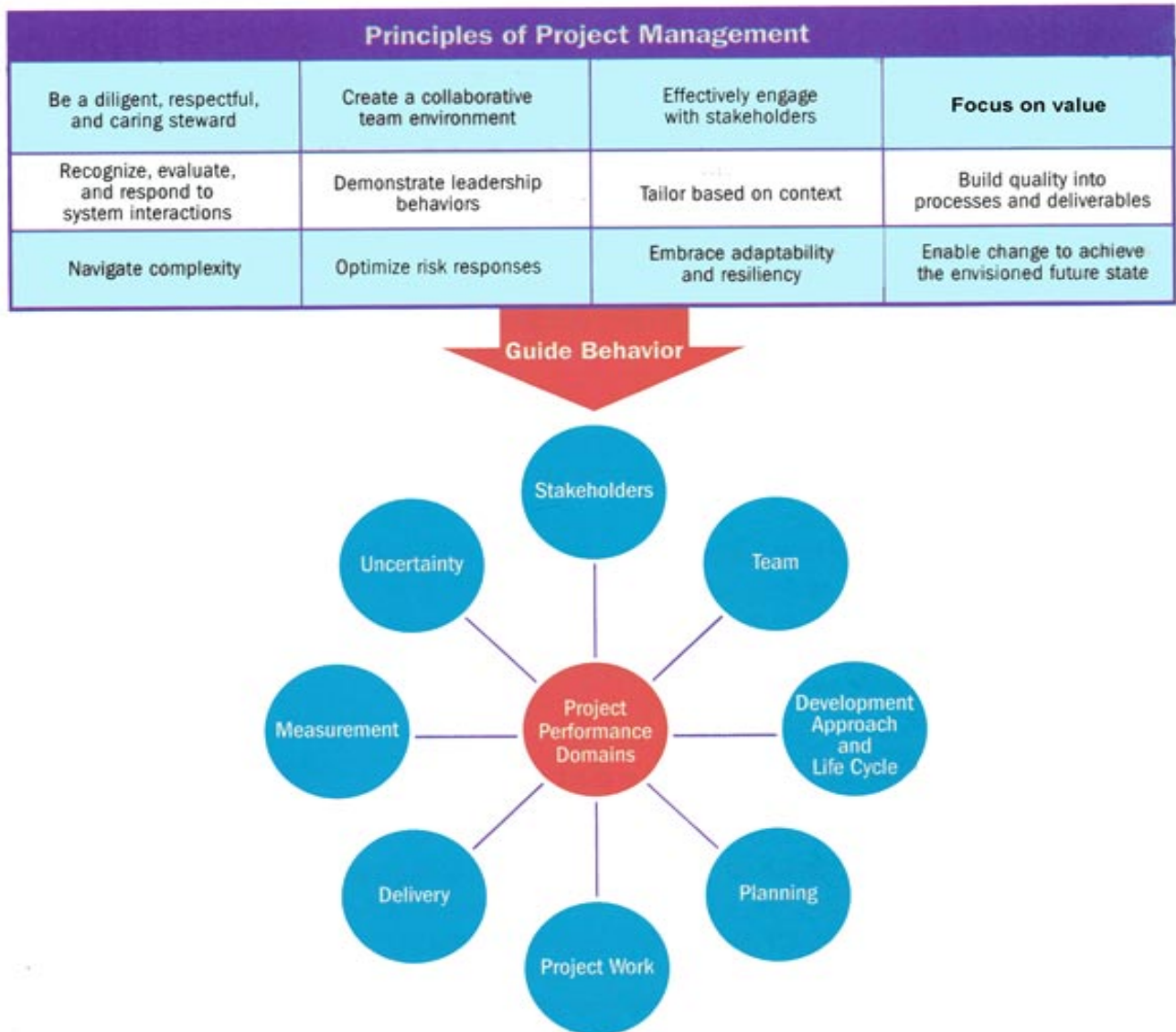
The text in this Introduction goes on to comment:<sup>3</sup>

"The work in the Project Performance Domains is guided by the principles of project management."

And

"[These principles] provide guidance for the behavior of people involved in projects as they influence and shape the performance domains to produce the intended outcomes. While there is conceptual overlap between the principles and performance domains, the principles guide behavior, while the performance domains present broad areas of focus in which to demonstrate that behavior."

The reader is then presented with "Figure 1-1: Relationship between Project Management Principles and Project Performance Domains."<sup>4</sup> In this illustration, twelve PM Principles ranging from "Be a diligent, respectful and caring steward" to "Enable change to achieve the envisioned future state" are shown as being collected by a large red arrow marked "Guide Behavior". This arrow feeds into an array of eight "Project Performance Domains" ranging from "Stakeholders" to "Project Work",<sup>5</sup> see Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1: Relationship between Project Management Principles and Project Performance Domains**

Next, under the heading: "1.3 CHANGES TO THE PMBOK<sup>®</sup> GUIDE"<sup>6</sup> we learn that:

"This edition of the PMBOK<sup>®</sup> Guide focuses on delivering outcomes regardless of the approach used by the project team. However, project practitioners using the PMBOK<sup>®</sup> Guide also benefit from some level of understanding of how to deliver projects."

Is it not "the approach" that the Guide is supposed to be all about? But wait, I am getting ahead of myself.

### ***About the authors***

The contributors to this edition were no doubt many and various. However, the actual writers of this book [B] are not separately identified from the list of around 770 contributing volunteers and the 7 staff who were responsible for putting the two books together. Indeed, one is left wondering who is responsible for this massive shift away from the content of previous PMBOK<sup>®</sup> Guides.

### **Book [B] Structure**

The contents of this Book [B], are set out in four chapters, each of which are subdivided into Sections that in turn are further divided into sub-sub sections and often beyond. The Table of Contents is not found within Book [B] as might be expected but instead as a follow on to the Table of Contents at the beginning of Book [A]. The chapters and top-level sections are as follows:

#### Chapter 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Structure of the PMBOK<sup>®</sup> Guide
- 1.2 Relationship of the PMBOK<sup>®</sup> Guide and the Standard for Project Management
- 1.3 Changes to the PMBOK<sup>®</sup> Guide
- 1.4 Relationship to PMIstandards<sup>+</sup><sup>7</sup>

#### Chapter 2 Project Performance Domains

- 2.1 Stakeholder performance domain (with 8 further subsections)
- 2.2 Team Performance Domain (with 14 further subsections)
- 2.3 Development approach and life cycle performance domain (with 10 subsections)
- 2.4 Planning performance domain (with 15 subsections)
- 2.5 Project work performance domain (with 10 subsections)
- 2.6 Delivery performance domain (with 13 subsections)
- 2.7 Measurement performance domain (with 19 subsections)
- 2.8 Uncertainty performance domain (with 13 subsections)

#### Chapter 3 Tailoring

- 3.1 Overview
- 3.2 Why tailor?
- 3.3 What to tailor (with 5 subsections)
- 3.4 The tailoring process (with 7 subsections)
- 3.5 Tailoring the performance domains (with 8 subsections)
- 3.6 Diagnostics
- 3.7 Summary

#### Chapter 4 Models, Methods and Artifacts

- 4.1 Overview
- 4.2 Commonly used models (with 30 subsections)
- 4.3 Models applied across performance domains

- 4.4 Commonly used methods (with 4 subsections)
- 4.5 Methods applied across performance domains
- 4.6 Commonly used artifacts (with 9 subsections)
- 4.7 Artifacts applied across performance domains.

Section 4.7 has but one paragraph starting with the observation that "Different artifacts are more likely to be useful in different performance domains."<sup>8</sup> This paragraph is followed by 3 pages of Table 4-3 that attempt to show the "Mapping of Artifacts likely to be used in Each Performance Domain".

This Book [B] has a total of 196 pages, excluding the subsequent Appendices. The publication as a whole has 5 Appendices and a Glossary. Interestingly, the first "Appendix X1" has 10 pages listing over 770 PMI contributors and reviewers. Of these, 14 are specifically listed as having input into shaping the content of the Standards and/or the Guide.<sup>9</sup>

### What we liked

This Book [B] called "PMBOK<sup>®</sup> Guide" certainly presents a lot of good advice regarding appropriate individual performance or behavior. This advice should be especially helpful to anyone engaged in any work that involves extensive communications, whether electronic or otherwise. In fact, the Introduction in Chapter 1 of this Book [B] describes the structure of its Chapter 2, the largest chapter in the Book, as follows:<sup>10</sup>

"This section identifies and describes eight project performance domains that form an integrated system to enable delivery of the project and intended outcomes."

That's good to know.

In a graphical representation,<sup>11</sup> it makes clear that twelve "Principles of Project Management"<sup>12</sup> are *behavioral* expectations. This "Guide Behavior" feeds into 8 Performance Domains as listed under Chapter 2 of the Book [B] Structure presented earlier.<sup>13</sup> These 8 Performance Domains are then individually described at length in the 123 pages that follow. The first of these is the "Stakeholders Performance Domain".

Prior to this publication, the term "stakeholders" often tends to be used to refer to anyone and everyone involved in a project, which is to say both the external stakeholders and the internal team members. However, in the graphic, "Stakeholders" and "Team" are now clearly listed separately.<sup>14</sup> This is an important distinction because the motivations of these two groups are frequently at odds. That is, the stakeholders are seeking "more (outcome) for less (effort or money)" while the team is attempting to "minimize project costs (through effectiveness and efficiency)" by keeping the actual costs within the bounds of their budget.<sup>15</sup>

In amongst the confusion that sometimes exists within a project team, it is good to see recognized that:<sup>16</sup>

"The project manager is key in establishing and maintaining a safe, respectful, nonjudgmental environment that allows the project team to communicate openly. One way to accomplish this is by modeling desired behavior, such as:

- Transparency, Integrity, Respect, Positive discourse, Support, Courage, and Celebrate success."

Each of which are described in detail.

Other similar good recommendations include:<sup>17</sup>

- Creating "a high-performance project team"
- Developing Leadership Skills
- Using Critical Thinking, and
- Applying Motivation, Interpersonal Skills, Decision making, and Conflict management.

Another obvious approach is introduced as "Tailoring Leadership Styles".<sup>18</sup> Some variables that influence "tailoring" include:<sup>19</sup>

- Experience with the type of project
- Maturity of the project team members
- Organizational governance structures, and
- Distributed project teams.

These too are described in some detail. However, the concept of "Tailoring" is discussed at length in Chapter 3.<sup>20</sup>

Yet another new term that is introduced to project management is the word "cadence". This term is used in describing "*Developing Approach and Life Cycle Performance Domain*" as follows:

- "A project life cycle consisting of phases that facilitate the delivery *cadence*<sup>21</sup> and development approach required to produce the project deliverables."<sup>22</sup>

For those not familiar with this musical term, "cadence" means to end, or return to the beginning of a piece music. However, here the term is redefined in the text as meaning: "A rhythm of activities conducted throughout the project."<sup>23</sup> Either way, a project is supposed to progress from beginning to end through a series of activities that vary considerably from beginning to end, especially through progressive phases. Indeed, that is the whole point of genuine project management.

However, while this usage may be useful in describing the process involved in a limited number of particular types of project, personally I think this term represents an unnecessary intervention into well-established project management terminology and practice. The use of the word "cadence" is therefore best avoided for projects in general, and particularly in a Guide such as this.

In general, the text is well written in a clear style, even if unnecessarily verbose at times. All sections and subsections are carefully numbered, even down to four digits or layers. They all contain good easy-to-read content in the selected eight *Project Performance Domains* as listed earlier.

While the Principles that are presented may be questioned, what then follows generally represents sound advice, which is effectively at an introductory level.

### Downside

Let's be quite transparent — the title of this Book [B] is written in large letters on the cover thus:

**"A Guide to the Project  
Management Body of Knowledge  
PMBOK® GUIDE  
Seventh Edition"**

Unfortunately, I argue that the contents of this Book [B] as it stands are nothing of the sort!

I would be inclined to stop right there, but maybe the uninitiated reader deserves at least some further explanation. For the record, I was the initiator of the term "PMBOK" and not surprisingly, this moniker stands for "Project Management Body of Knowledge". It was years later that PMI chose to registered the name with an "®"<sup>24</sup>.

### *A little bit of history*

At the 1977 Annual PMI Conference, there was a push to introduce a project management certification program. However, it was not until 1981 that a more determined effort was made by past President Matthew Parry and others to present to the PMI Board of the day a proposal to identify a Body of Knowledge of Project Management. This proposal was to define such a body of knowledge that would establish project management as a *unique* discipline and eventually as an independent profession. Indeed, a substantial body of identifiable and independent body of knowledge of project management (PMBOK) was necessary for purposes of instruction, examination and certification (i.e., Standards).<sup>25</sup>

A project was started to assemble such a knowledge resource, when it was realized that a terms of reference was required on which to build. It is worth noting the answers that followed, namely:

- Objective: to establish a systematic model/framework/structure for a PMBOK
- Purpose: To organize and classify
  - To integrate
  - To correlate
  - To store and retrieve
  - To build on what we have
- Characteristics:
  - Simple
  - Logical
  - Saleable
  - Comprehensive
  - Compatible
  - Systematic
  - Understandable

Based on these criteria, there emerged a consensus that a number of uniquely distinct special skills or performance domains existed. This was hardly surprising because at the time a number of competing organizations were eyeing the possibility of adding some basic material on project management as a sideline to their existing turf. Consequently, the members of PMI at the time had to tread very carefully to ensure that their selection of content did not obviously tread on anyone else's toes.

This study and development of content resulted in the following body of knowledge content:

- The **Framework** — a discussion of life cycles and the typical activities encountered in each of four phases
- Scope** Management — consisting of six elements
- Quality** Management — consisting of eleven elements
- Time** Management — consisting of four top elements divided into seventeen sub-elements
- Cost** Management — consisting of four elements
- Risk** Management — consisting of two elements subdivided into ten sub-elements
- Human Resource** Management — consisting of two elements divided into six sub-elements
- Contract/Procurement** Management — consisting of six elements, and
- Communications** Management — consisting of five elements

Each of these chapters in the original PMBOK document included a Glossary of Terms that is specific to each of their respective domains. A reprint of that document is available from <http://www.maxwideman.com/PMBOK1987reborn/intro.htm>

It is very important to note here that **each of these topics listed is specific to project management alone**, but not specific to any particular industry. It is also important to note that each of **these topics require specific skill sets** resulting in technical "specialties" in each of the performance domains listed.

Since the publication of the original PMBOK document in 1987, only two additional specialties have been added, namely: *Project Integration* and *Stakeholder Management*.

## Conclusion

By comparing the Table of Contents of Book [B] to the original PMBOK 1987, it is clear that **a lot of extraneous detail of a behavioral nature has been included, and a lot of important material identifying specific skill sets has been omitted**. In short, the latest so-called PMBOK<sup>®</sup> Guide follows a completely different theme of advocating behavior, rather than addressing the foundational basics of professional project management **as originally intended**.

In short, to avoid total confusion of the PMI membership, *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge – Seventh Edition* as it stands should be officially withdrawn and republished under a more appropriate title.

R. Max Wideman  
Fellow, PMI

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<sup>1</sup> A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (*The PMBOK<sup>®</sup> Guide*), published by the Project Management Institute, Inc., PA, 2021, Book [B] pB3.

<sup>2</sup> Namely Book [A] as described last month.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, The Guide pB4

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pB5

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, Duly elaborated in Chapter 2

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pB6

<sup>7</sup> Ibid PMI's digital content platform

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p192

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pB197

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pB3

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pB5 Figure 1-1. Relationship between Project Management Principles and Project Performance Domains.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, The 12 "Principles" shown in the Figure 1-1 are collectively summarized as "Guide Behavior" that feed into 8 "Project Performance Domains".

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, in the graphic, 8 "Project Performance Domains" are identified.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pB7

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, Well that's the theory anyway. Regrettably, on many projects conducted internally in an organization and using internal payroll people, these costs are not really seriously accounted for.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, pB20-21

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, pB22-B29

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, pB29

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pB30

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pB131-B152

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, emphasis added.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, pB32

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, pB33

<sup>24</sup> This was done without my permission. When I found out and raised this with the PMI staff at the time, they said it was too late to change.

<sup>25</sup> A more complete history may be found in the publication; "*Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) of the Project Management Institute*, 1987. It was approved by the PMI Board in March 1987 and published shortly thereafter. See page 0-1