



Providing Agility to your Programmes

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Executive Summary

This paper reviews both the MSP (Managing Successful Programmes) and the new AgilePgM (Agile Programme Management) approaches. It seeks to consider, at a high level, the elements of each approach that are similar and highlight the added benefits that are introduced with the AgilePgM approach. The paper is not a substitute to wider knowledge of both approaches, and readers are recommended to refer to the full APMG/DSDM Consortium handbooks should they desire further knowledge on either of the methodologies.

The paper highlights that whilst there are similarities between the methodologies, the new AgilePgM approach expands on the culture change and mind-set that Agile Project Management techniques has introduced to organisations to introduce these at programme level. It has also been structured such that it is a suitable mind-set for a range of programmes enabling agility to be enhanced in all your programmes and not just in a software development environment.



1. Introduction

Increasingly in the current climate Programme Managers are being asked to deliver a range of projects, often combined with transformational change. There can also be the challenge faced by some organisations over the confusion between Programmes, Projects and operational process improvements.

There are a number of recognized frameworks that organisations can make use of to help them manage their Programmes one of which is Managing Successful Programmes (MSP). This has been in existence since 1999, with the current edition (fourth) since 2011. The APMG in association with the DSDM Consortium have also recently (2014) introduced a new approach to Programme Management, designed to complement the Agile Project Management approach. This builds upon the Agile Manifesto which has been in existence since 2001, scaling the agile methods to meet enterprise requirements.

This paper is going to look at both of these, to consider why the Agile Programme Management approach has been introduced, and to highlight the benefits to your organization of bringing agility into your programmes irrespective of the methodology used to oversee them.

Whilst the paper will introduce some of the key principles of both methodologies, it does not aim to provide a full summary of each. To read more on them it is recommended that the official APMG/DSDM Consortium handbooks are referred to, or training courses attended.

2. Overview of MSP Principles & Guidance

MSP is a well-respected methodology for delivering programmes of change, which complements well the Prince2 methodology for delivering projects. Prince2 has traditionally been a waterfall method for managing projects, however in 2015 an extension is being released to include agile techniques within it.

In MSP a programme is defined as a temporary, flexible organization created to coordinate, direct and oversee the implementation of a set of related projects and activities in order to deliver outcomes and benefits related to the organization's strategic objectives. It is also highlighted that a programme is likely to last a number of years.

MSP's core is defined by 7 principles, 9 governance themes and 6 transformational flows.

MSP defines 7 principles to reflect the characteristics of successful programmes:

1. Remaining aligned with corporate strategy
2. Leading change
3. Envisioning and communicating a better future
4. Focusing on the benefits and threats to them
5. Adding value
6. Designing and delivering a coherent capability
7. Learning from experience



The common theme across all of these principles is that the business must need the changes/outcomes being delivered by the programme, which it appreciates by initially envisioning then gaining the identified benefits.

The principles indicate an inherent flexibility, to enable the programme to change and develop over its duration, to ensure that it continues to remain aligned with corporate strategy, add value and learn from experience.

The governance themes within MSP provide the control framework through which the programme can monitor its objectives and remain within corporate visibility and control. Within the governance theme the following elements are identified:

1. Programme organization
2. Vision
3. Leadership and stakeholder engagement
4. Benefits management
5. Blueprint design and delivery
6. Planning and control
7. Business case
8. Risk and Issue management
9. Quality and assurance management

MSP highlights that most of its programmes are delivering transformational change the governance will need to be integrated with the corporate governance framework.

These headings are typical of governance approaches, either at programme or project level. However, when they are considered in more detail it can be seen that MSP's governance approach enables organizations to set a vision then plan towards that over a number of years by identifying a number of tranches which each implement a number of projects to enable a set of outcomes and benefits to be realized by the business.

Each tranche delivers part of the final future state for the programme, as described in the blueprint. It is worth noting that MSP identifies that on larger programmes, there may be intermediate blueprints describing the future state for each tranche.

Within the transformational flow of a programme, MSP defines the following stages:

1. Identifying a programme
2. Defining a programme
3. Delivering the capability
4. Realizing the benefits
5. Managing the tranches
6. Closing a programme

We are specifically looking at the pace of change and agility in the paper, therefore our focus is on the elements of the transformational flow that directly relate to the scope and speed of delivering



business benefits. Within MSP quite significant work is entered into in the early part of the programme ensuring that the Vision for the programme and the requirements are well documented within flows 1 and 2 above. Then the programme cycles through the delivery and realization of benefits through each tranche prior to closure.

There are important aspects of MSP which I have seen overlooked within the transformational flow which relate directly to the agility and ability to change and flex the scope of programme during its lifetime. Through my experience, it has been observed that organizations can spend too much time trying to define in detail all of the desired outcomes of the programme during the defining a programme stage when in reality only the first tranche of a programme can be defined in any detail, with later tranches being planned in more detail as part of the management of tranche boundaries. It is perhaps this lack of appreciation which has led to the introduction of the Agile Programme Management Handbook.

3. Agile Programme Management Principles

Towards the end of 2014, the DSDM Consortium in association with the APMG, published the Agile Programme Management Handbook. This handbook provides guidance on how to expand the use agile principles at the Programme level, whilst maintaining appropriate governance.

This approach has been based upon the core principles from the Agile Manifesto, and Agile Project Management to scale them into an enterprise solution that works well at the programme level. It is refreshing to see the agile approaches being adopted at an enterprise level, and not just being considered as a software development approach.

Agile Programme Management has 5 principles:

1. Programme goals are clearly and continuously aligned to business strategy
2. Benefits are realized incrementally and as early as possible
3. Governance focusses on creating a coherent capability
4. Decision-making powers are delegated to the lowest possible level
5. Agile programmes are iterative and have the ability to contain both agile and non-agile projects

From these it can be seen that there is a synergy with the principles from MSP, but introduces a key concept from agile around the empowerment of the teams regarding decision-making powers. This is a fundamental change in mind-set from the more traditional command and control management techniques.

To ensure that the governance is focused on the vision of the programme, and delivery of benefits these are the areas the method highlights within the governance chapter:

1. Major levels of governance
2. Decision making
3. Handling autonomous projects
4. Consolidating existing agile and non-agile projects into a programme

5. Empowerment

In line with agile principles, the governance approach as above, is focused on creating a coherent capability for the organization. The governance strategy should interface to the governance bodies within the organization, but protect this level of governance from the teams delivering the work. It is particularly important that the major levels of decision making are agreed, along with the escalation process. As with Agile Project Management, these decisions should be delegated to the lowest possible level, to enable slick decision making processes. This shift in mind-set can prove challenging for an organization, however as with all change processes once implemented the benefits can be achieved.

Individual projects within the programme can be managed via the most appropriate method for that project. This enables the component projects of a programme to be managed with both agile and waterfall methods.

As with MSP there are a suite of documented products that are created, and updated throughout the programme lifecycle. Throughout the guidance, it is highlighted that these should only be developed to a suitable level of detail to enable the capability of the programme to be delivered, and benefits realized.

These are generated throughout the programme lifecycle, which is described via the following 6 stages, or phases:

1. Pre-programme
2. Programme Feasibility
3. Programme Foundations
4. Capability Evolution
5. Tranche Review
6. Programme Close

The visual aspects of the handbook draw attention to the capability evolution aspect of the lifecycle as this is the area in which the programme's capability is enabled, and benefits are incrementally realized.

Central to the mind-set behind an agile approach is that the programme develops and changes in an iterative manner over its lifetime. This means that the programme plan, and roadmap will not be fixed at the start of the programme, but will be shaped and updated throughout the programme to ensure that business need is still be met, benefits delivered and enable current advances to be implemented as part of the programme.

4. Comparison of Approaches

It will have been noted that there are similarities between the approaches recommended within these two programme management methods, indeed similarities will be found should we compare other programme management methods as well.

In reviewing the Agile approach, it was felt that it provided a light touch approach to describing an approach to managing a programme of projects. This may make it more enticing to senior management, who may be less likely to want to wade through a tome of a handbook (such as the MSP one). The agile approach, both at programme and project level, highlights the importance of culture adoption and support from senior management. Keeping the guidance streamlined and focused will help engage them in understanding their importance to the programme and encourage the delegation of decisions that they would historically have been involved with. There is also an important role for the business and its stakeholders in prioritizing the scope and benefits of the programme.

Comparing the two methods let's look first at the principles:

MSP	AgilePgM
Remaining aligned with corporate strategy	Programme goals are clearly and continuously aligned to business strategy
Focusing on the benefits and threats to them	Benefits are realized incrementally and as early as possible
Leading change	Governance focusses on creating a coherent capability
Envisioning and communicating a better future	Decision-making powers are delegated to the lowest possible level
Designing and delivering a coherent capability	Agile programmes are iterative and have the ability to contain both Agile and non-Agile projects
Adding value	<i>Part of continual alignment to business strategy</i>
Learning from experience	Part of incremental delivery

Table 1: MSP and AgilePgM Principles

It can be seen that all of the MSP principles are also part of those from AgilePgM, however the agile ones draw focus onto the continual alignment to business strategy, with benefits realized incrementally and as early as possible. Whilst these are included with the MSP principles, it is felt that they become clouded and the iterative approach does not come through quite so clearly. It is important to note the importance of adding value and learning from experience that are principles within the MSP approach. Within the AgilePgM approach, the learning is part of its iterative and incremental nature.

Moving onto the governance approaches, it can be seen that the MSP governance theme provides a thorough and detailed set of guidance, whereas the agile approach takes a much higher level within the governance strategy. Within AgilePgM the governance strategy focusses on the importance of enabling the parts of the programme to progress with minimal interference, whilst retaining the



consistency of the programme's vision and benefits. Core to these is agreeing the decision making guidelines for the programme.

The table below compares the governance and management tools recommended by both approaches.

MSP	AgilePgM
Vision	Vision
Leadership and stakeholder engagement	Stakeholder Engagement, Communication & Management
Business case	Business Case
Blueprint design and delivery	Business Architecture Model
Planning and control	Planning
Benefits management	Management & Control (benefit delivery)
Risk and Issue management	Management & Control (Risks & Issues)
Quality and assurance management	Quality Management
Programme Organisation	Roles, responsibilities & characteristics

Table 2: Governance and Management tools

In addition to the higher level governance described in the agile approach, there are also recommendations for the control documentation which should be developed during the lifecycle of the programme. These include a similar range to that of MSP (such as Vision Statement, Business Case, Programme Plan, Roadmap, Tranche Plans, Risk & Issue logs, Stakeholder Engagement Strategy, Comms Plan, Prioritized benefits definition and associated realization plan). Where MSP has its Blueprint, AgilePgM has a Business Architecture Model). This highlights the similarities between the two programmes, and perhaps also draws attention to the fact that whilst programme management engages with users and change to create the agility to its requirements it ensures that this is done in a structured manner in both approaches.

Finally, looking at the lifecycle of both methods, we can see that they are very similar:

MSP	AgilePgM
Identifying a programme	Pre-programme
Defining a programme	Programme Feasibility
Delivering the capability	Programme Foundations
Realizing the benefits	Capability Evolution
Managing the tranches	Tranche Review
Closing a Programme	Programme Close

Table 3: Lifecycles

Interestingly within MSP we can see that Realising the benefits is detailed as one of the stages of the lifecycle, whereas in AgilePgM it is contained within the Capability Evolution. This might appear strange, given the importance of benefits in the agile approach. However, this is due to the enhanced iterative nature of the AgilePgM approach where each of the component projects are delivering capability, and associated benefits in small chunks. The capability and benefits are therefore very tightly coupled.



5. Conclusion

In conclusion, both methodologies provide a structure in which to run a programme on behalf of an organisation, which aim to achieve the defined vision by delivering the capability and realizing the associated benefits. The overriding strength of the agile approach is that it emphasizes the early and frequent delivery of the capability and benefits to the organisation. By reducing the effort that may be made into the definition of a programme on the MSP approach, the Agile programme can start delivering some capability earlier building on it incrementally.

Equally important is the emphasis that the agile approach puts onto the definition of tranches, where detailed planning of the required projects is only done at that point. This enables potential projects to be changed (or even dropped from the programme) where they no longer meet the business need. MSP includes this flexibility within its own management of tranches and planning approach, however in my opinion is given less emphasis.

Taking both approaches into consideration, it is my view that MSP can be utilized well by organization to manage their programmes (even where the component projects include agile and waterfall projects). However, those using this approach would do well to consider the governance, definition of projects, tranche reviews and early benefits that are emphasized in the agile approach. Where an organization already has a strong MSP approach, and makes full use of reviews, tranche planning etc, then it is unlikely that there will be as many benefits to the organization in adopting the agile programme management approach. However, they can still benefit from the mind-set that the AgilePgM approach brings with it.

If an organization does not yet have a strong programme management approach, then they would do well to consider starting with the Agile Programme Management approach, enabling them to develop their programmes in an iterative approach, with a focus on the business needs. This may also lead to an introduction of AgilePM (Agile Project Management) within the component projects.

So, why was there felt to be a need for an AgilePgM approach if MSP could already deliver this? In my opinion, as an MSP Practitioner, I feel that AgilePgM draws attention to the flexible and fuzzy nature of a programme that may run for a number of years. It highlights the benefits of a good governance structure, where decision making is delegated to the lowest levels possible. This aids agile decisions between the team delivering the early and iterative capability (with its associated benefits) and the end user. In parallel, it ensures that the programme maintains a focus of the business needs and vision for the programme. So whilst much of this is somewhere within MSP, AgilePgM brings these into focus.

To conclude, in the current climate organisations will be required to continue to change and develop, otherwise they are likely to fail to stay viable. The pace of this change is anticipated to continue at its current rate, if not increase over the next decade. Therefore it will be important to ensure that your programmes maintain and enhance their agility to focus on the needs of the business ensuring that only capability that delivers benefits to the organization are actually delivered. To deliver agility within your programmes organisations must remember that the detailed planning for the projects can only be defined during each tranche review, enabling change to be embraced.