

Brainstorming The PMBOK® Guide
By Muhamed Abdomerovic, Dipl. Eng., PMP
(A book review by R. Max Wideman)

Publisher: Project Management Publications, Kentucky.

Web: www.pmpublications.net Email: contact.us@pmpublications.net

Introduction

We are selective in the books we are willing to review on this web site, so some books get turned down. What we are interested in is material that brings new insight into the discipline of project management. This latest book does just that.

As most people know, and certainly those who visit this web site, the Project Management Institute ("PMI") has published the Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge ("PMBOK Guide"). This guide is PMI's standard of reference for project management practice and documents the various areas of project management functional knowledge required. However, the descriptive content is structured according to classic systems theory using the basic and simple Input-Process-Output model. This approach involves describing a considerable number of processes that are encountered in the course of managing a project and that tend to be repeated for each knowledge area. It also results in describing an even larger number of inputs and outputs.

Understanding all of this in detail is a considerable challenge for any reader but especially for those studying the PMBOK Guide with a view to adapting it to a practical project. Of course the Guide is not intended as a project management methodology, but only a statement of the things that a project manager should know about. Nevertheless, many people do try to apply the guide to their projects, in effect, as a methodology.

Now, author Muhamed Abdomerovic has undertaken the tremendous task of analyzing the complete PMBOK Guide to trace all those inputs and outputs and present them as logical sets and in chronological sequences of content. These sets he presents from several different points of view and adds comments, suggestions and advice. As Muhamed explains, in order for a project manager to plan, execute and control any project according to the PMBOK Guide, it is essential to understand the inherent sequencing of inputs and outputs.

So, as Muhamed says, lack of this information to date represents a knowledge gap between the theoretical concepts of a document that has experienced a spectacular circulation and the far more modest application of these ideas to practical project management. Muhamed has clearly filled this gap. In the course of his analysis he has also not surprisingly found some disconnects and anomalies that hopefully the Institute will correct in the next update of the PMBOK Guide. So his book provides some missing links. However, the book is a detailed explanation of the PMBOK Guide and not a criticism of it.

A CD is also available to supplement the book. It contains fourteen PowerPoint files (with a total of nearly 150 slides) providing the reader with color illustrations of the figures in the book. These could be

invaluable for lecturers wishing to illustrate the ideas behind the PMBOK Guide.

Book Structure

In order to take advantage of Muhamed's book, it is not only necessary to be familiar with PMI's PMBOK Guide, but to understand its structure. As Muhamed explains in his **Introduction** Overview, the PMBOK Guide:¹

"is devoted almost entirely to identifying, explaining, and relating its thirty-nine project management processes. These process are classified in two different ways to show:

1. How processes interact, from project initiation until project closeout.
2. Which project management knowledge area each process belongs to."

Then he very wisely adds:

"[The] Reader should note that the [five] process groups listed . . . represent a project management process cycle, not the project life cycle which is described in Chapter 2 of The [PMBOK] Guide."

Following that Introduction, the book has only four chapters:

1. Process Relationships
2. Process Sequencing
3. Process Iterated Loop
4. Talking the Walk

These are followed by an **Appendix, Glossary, Index** and **List of Figures**.

The main purpose of **Chapter 1** is to enable the reader to understand the context of each of the PMBOK Guide's processes. This is achieved by providing an overview of input/output linkages of each process.² Since this process information is the foundation of Muhamed's book, it is essential that the reader understands this relatively short chapter. However, section 1.3 of chapter 1 is more of a reference section than a solid read.

Chapter 2, is by far the longest, because it examines all the processes in the PMBOK Guide. The chapter does so from the perspective of PMI's five Project Management Process Groups. As set out in chapter 3 of the PMBOK Guide, these process groups are "Initiating, Planning, Executing, Controlling, and Closing".³

In **Chapter 3**, Muhamed singles out three of the five process groups, namely Planning, Executing and Controlling, and describes what he calls the "iterated process loop that exists between the central process groups." As he says:⁴

"In a project that is managed according to The [PMBOK] Guide, the Planning Processes group provides the Executing Processes group with a documented project plan early in the project. As the project progresses, the Planning Processes group keeps providing documented updates to the project plan."

In his book, a simple flow chart illustrates this basic concept, which is then followed by a more detailed discussion of the impacts of this concept.

For **Chapter 4**, Muhamed takes a different tack. As he says:

"The first three chapters of *This Book* explain difficult technical details described or implied in The [PMBOK] Guide. . . . However, unlike in the previous chapters, the purpose of this chapter is achieved through novel-like, narrative description of the Critical Output Sequence and the associated relationships" and "does the above in the context of a real project."

The **Glossary** is brief, but welcome. It lists and explains the terms unique to the book.

What we liked

As mentioned earlier, Muhamed presents the PMBOK Guide's "Links among Process Groups in a Phase"⁵ as a flow chart as shown in Figure 1.⁶

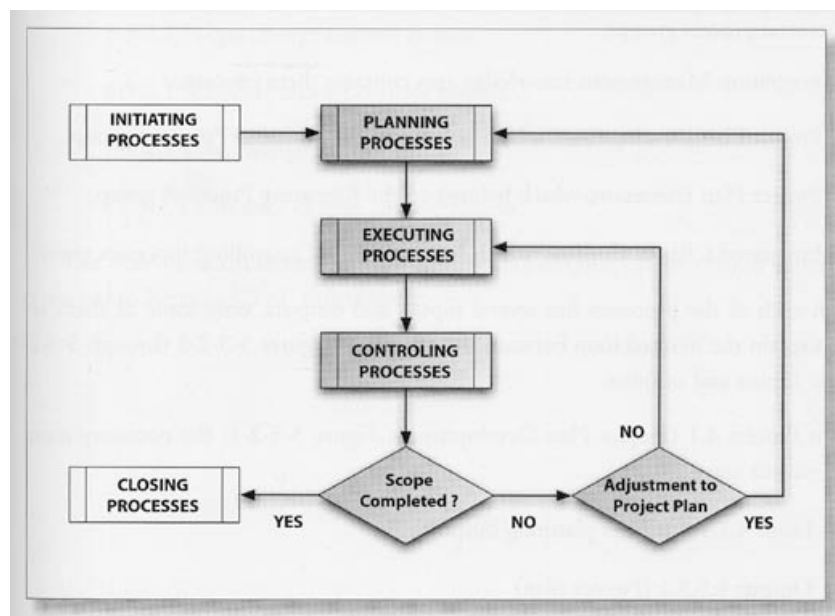


Figure 1: Muhamed's flow chart presentation of PMBOK's main process groups

For us, this representation makes the overall process much more understandable.

For purposes of illustrating the logical relationships between all of the PMBOK Guide's inputs and outputs, Muhamed introduces a twenty-step time sequence. This is shown at the summary level in Figure 2.⁷ In the particular case of Integrated Change Control, however, the steps shown are true only for the first iteration or occurrence. This results in a dynamic process in which there are periodic step number changes as a result of project updating.⁸

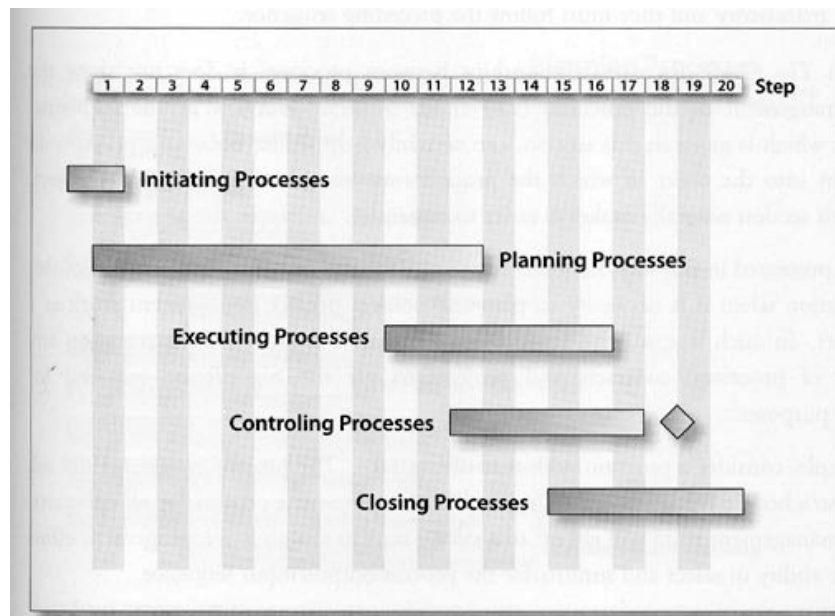


Figure 2: Muhamed's 20-step Process Sequence (Summary Level)

This stepped time scale is most useful in laying out the more complex logic of the lower level inputs and outputs, such as that shown in Figure 3.⁹

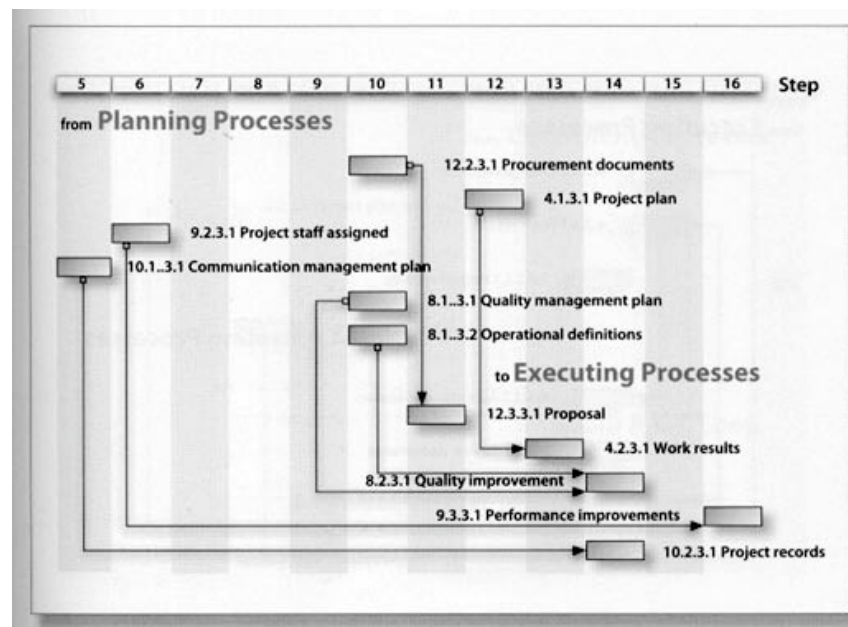


Figure 3: Example of Key Outputs from planning to executing processes

Having described his iterated process group, in chapter 3, Muhamed then infers that:¹⁰

1. Links between the central process groups, which effectively consist of input and output relationships, exist and they are used to update project data by periodic iteration.
2. The Executing Process group and the Controlling Processes group are always related and iterated, since one cannot control something that is not executed and all executed work has to be controlled.

3. However, relation and iteration of the Planning Processes group with the Controlling Processes group is optional and it depends on a need to adjust the project plan. This need is determined by the outcomes of the Controlling Processes.

As Muhamed observes:¹¹

"Relationships within the process groups and relationships between the process groups are important for development of application procedures based on The [PMBOK] Guide. Definitions of relationships between the central process groups . . . are simple. However, to make these definitions work for real world projects, it is necessary to clearly show all of their constituent details implied in The Guide."

Downside

In order to track all those inputs and outputs, Muhamed found it necessary to adopt a specification-type numbering scheme of the general format xx.x.x.x. However, the PMBOK guide also has a similar numbering scheme for its paragraphs. Further, Muhamed's illustrations appear to have their own similar numbering scheme. So, we got a bit lost trying to keep track of which was which.

Unfortunately, this book may have a relatively short shelf life as PMI is planning to introduce an updated version of The PMBOK Guide in 2005. According to a recent PMI announcement:¹²

"While the official comment period has closed and no further recommendations for changes can be accepted, you can still access and view the *Exposure Draft of the PMBOK® Guide—Third Edition* online. This exposure draft is **NOT an official PMI Standard** and is not currently a replacement for the *PMBOK® Guide—2000 Edition*. For that reason, it is not available in a printed version. For your convenience, however, members can download and print the exposure draft directly from the site. Almost 2,900 recommendations for changes were received during the comment period, and more than half of those will be accepted as part of the exposure draft process. As a result, the final *PMBOK® Guide—Third Edition* will differ in many ways from the *Exposure Draft of the PMBOK® Guide—Third Edition*."

So, it will depend on how the changes to the final version of the PMBOPK Guide, Third Edition, will impact Muhamed's book. Still, having done the basic research hopefully it will not be too difficult for him to produce a Second Edition of Brainstorming The PMBOK® Guide.

Summary

The author is to be congratulated on his diligent study of the PMBOK Guide and for providing a comprehensive analysis and description that anyone should be able to follow by applying a little time and effort to its content. This is a technical book that provides clarification and support to the PMBOK Guide. It should prove invaluable to project management educators professing to understand and teach the PMBOK guide, as well as researchers and developers of competency frameworks, and others developing Guide-based project management practices in their companies.

The book is thorough and the content logically presented and comprehensive. The text is well laid out, supported by well prepared illustrations and the whole printed on quality paper. The fact that we wrote the Foreword to the book should not be taken as unreasonable bias, nor of vested promotional interest.

R. Max Wideman
Fellow, PMI

¹ Abdomerovic, M., Brainstorming The PMBOK Guide, Project Management Publications, KY, 2004, p1

² Ibid. p28

³ Ibid. p113

⁴ Ibid. p189

⁵ A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge, Project Management Institute, 2000 Edition, PA, p31

⁶ Abdomerovic, M., Brainstorming The PMBOK Guide, Project Management Publications, KY, 2004, p191

⁷ Ibid. p119

⁸ Ibid. p224

⁹ Ibid. p169

¹⁰ Ibid. p189

¹¹ Ibid. p190

¹² Project Management Institute announcement received by Email March 12, 2004