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# THE PROCESS PARADOX IN THE THIRD & PUBLIC SECTOR

Why '**social good**' teams need project management, even if they think they don't.

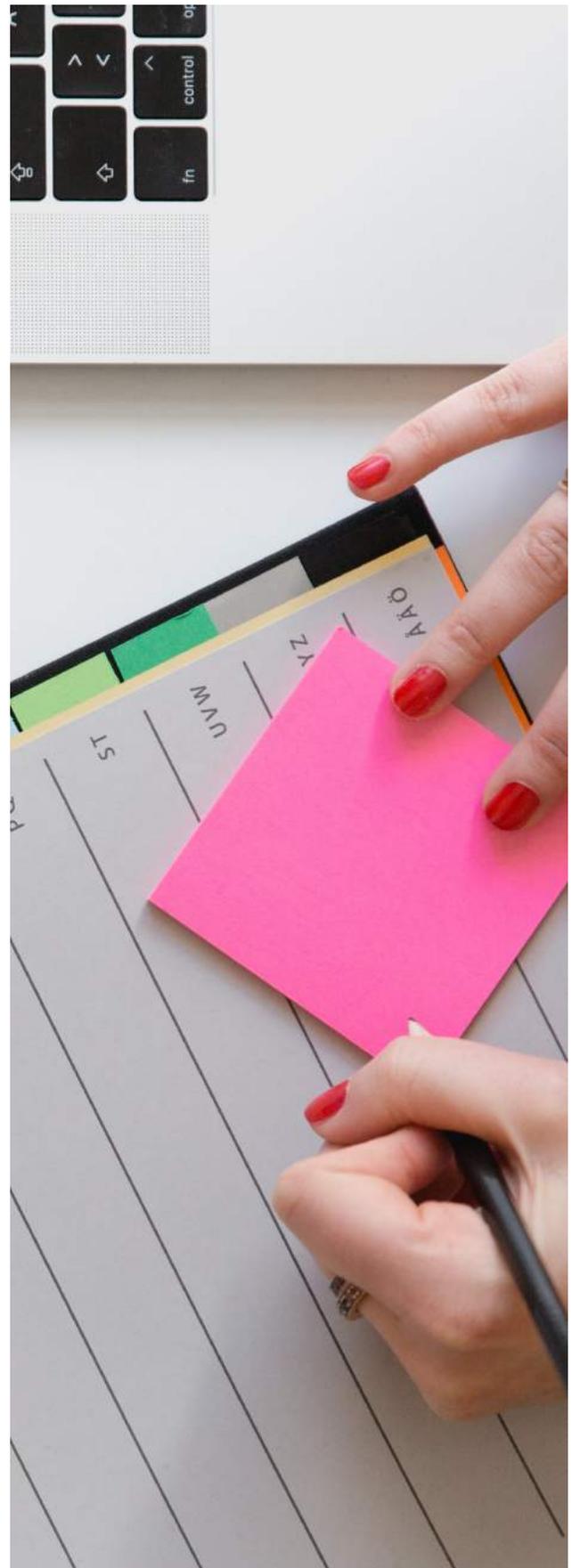


# “WE DON'T DO PROCESS”

That's a phrase we have often come across, particularly when conducting [project management reviews](#) or delivering projects for creative, third and public sector organisations. This 'process paradox', as we will refer to it in this paper, is just that - a paradox, in that **it's simply not possible to execute a project or programme - well, without (the right) processes in place.**

## YES, YOU DO!

Process is at the core of all good project execution and is even more crucial when teams are managing projects that directly influence the lives of so many people, as social good organisations do. Why then is there, in some organisations, a resistance towards structured project management frameworks, especially in the likes of charities, smaller local authorities and social good start-ups? That's a question this paper will explore. **We'll also offer some practical ideas on how to overcome this challenge.**



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# A BRIEF HISTORY OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN THE PUBLIC & THIRD SECTOR

The UK Government first introduced 'structured' project management in 1989 in the form of PRINCE2 (PRojects IN Controlled Environments).

According to the PRINCE2 methodology, **a project is a temporary organisation that is created for the purpose of delivering one or more business products according to an agreed business case.** As such, the PRINCE2 philosophy enabled project teams in the sector to begin taking a more practical, results-driven approach to their work, much like the private sector already was. What once was a function predominantly found in industries delivering large-scale, complex projects, such as ICT and construction, soon became perceived as a necessary capability in a diverse range of industries including the public, third, education and creative sectors.

**This 'recognition' came out of necessity – prior to the introduction of structured project management, there were a lot of resources wasted on projects not planned and delivered effectively.**



## WHAT IS PRINCE2?

PRINCE2 is a structured project management method and practitioner certification programme used globally. It emphasises dividing projects into **manageable and controllable stages**. This is our preferred PM methodology.

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# THE MOST POPULAR PM METHODOLOGIES

According to the 2019 Arras People Project Management Benchmark Report, these are the most common project/programme management certifications in the UK:

## 1. PRINCE2

Roughly two-thirds of the pool surveyed by Arras People said that they have the Practitioner level of achievement. Indeed, there are over one million certified PRINCE2 professionals around the globe and it is firmly established as the world's most practised method for project management.

## 2. MSP

Managing Successful Programmes (MSP) offers a best practice methodology for planning, instigating, managing and concluding successful programs. It breaks them down into multiple projects, each with clear roles, objectives and benefits.

## 3. APM PMQ

PPQ is a new developmental examination-based qualification that assesses your capability in delivering projects, programmes and portfolios. It utilises mix of tools, techniques, processes and skills.

## 4. ITIL – A FRAMEWORK OF BEST PRACTICE

ITIL® is a public framework that describes best practice in IT service management. It provides a framework for the governance of IT, the “service wrap,” and focuses on the continual measurement and improvement of the quality of IT service delivered, from both a business and a customer perspective.

SOURCE: [HTTPS://WWW.ARRASPEOPLE.CO.UK/THE-PROJECT-MANAGEMENT-BENCHMARK-REPORT-FROM-ARRAS-PEOPLE/PMBR-2019/](https://www.arraspeople.co.uk/the-project-management-benchmark-report-from-arras-people/pmbr-2019/)

# WHY DO CHARITIES, PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANISATIONS & 'SOCIAL GOOD'-DOERS NEED PROJECT MANAGEMENT?

Many charities, public sector organisations and others in the 'social good' sectors are, whether they recognise this formally or not, project-based - in that most of their income is derived from funds that are specific to a cause. They have a particular set of outputs and activities, with a specific timeframe and specific deliverables to be created, for that investment. That, by definition, is a project

In addition to this, institutional funders often require organisations such as charities to have project management practices in place to ensure that their investment is used in the right manner, by the right people, for the right outputs and objectives.

**However, many charities and other social good organisations, while possessing the technical skills needed to deliver their mission, do not have the project management skills/processes in place required to enable the delivery of projects according to time, within an agreed scope, according to a budget and in a controlled manner that keeps all stakeholders engaged and satisfied.**

At best, this can lead to organisations still delivering their mission but in an 'untidy' way: often over budget, delayed, with an overworked workforce and, in some cases, unhappy clients.

At worst, this can be a true threat to them as organisations: lack of capacity and capability to effectively deliver projects leads to significant losses and therefore becomes a viability issue.





*Poorly training project managers, attempting too many projects, and a lack of project funding are the top three project management challenges.*

- The state of project management: Annual survey 2018,  
Wellington



## WHERE DOES THE 'PROCESS PARADOX' COME FROM?

Many organisations, regardless of sector, struggle with 'process' - perceiving process as bureaucracy or a 'function' of the back office. This notion is a paradox because to have ends, you need means. An effective, structured approach to delivering projects (the means) is simply critical in delivering them (the ends).

**Some common reasons for the paradox include:**

- Lack of **formal training**
- Project management staff coming from **varying backgrounds without being given the necessary training and tools**
- **Understaffing & budget** issues
- Management & **communication** problems
- The misconception that **'creative' teams don't require formal PM** processes

**There are other reasons, however, that are more specific to the 'social good' sectors, especially charities and smaller government-funded organisations. They may include:**

- The unique **workplace culture**
- A fear of **'hierarchical' decision-making** (common in nonprofits, for instance) and the idea that process will reinforce an unwanted hierarchy
- A **'but we've always done it this way'** attitude
- Project management methodology/ process **fatigue**
- **Failure to adapt** PM tools to suit the organisation's specific needs





Public sector project managers work in an environment which very often is not familiar with results-oriented project management, and are constantly dealing with political interference in the management of projects and the challenges of working with political appointees.

- 'KEY COMPETENCES OF PUBLIC SECTOR PROJECT MANAGERS' (2014)

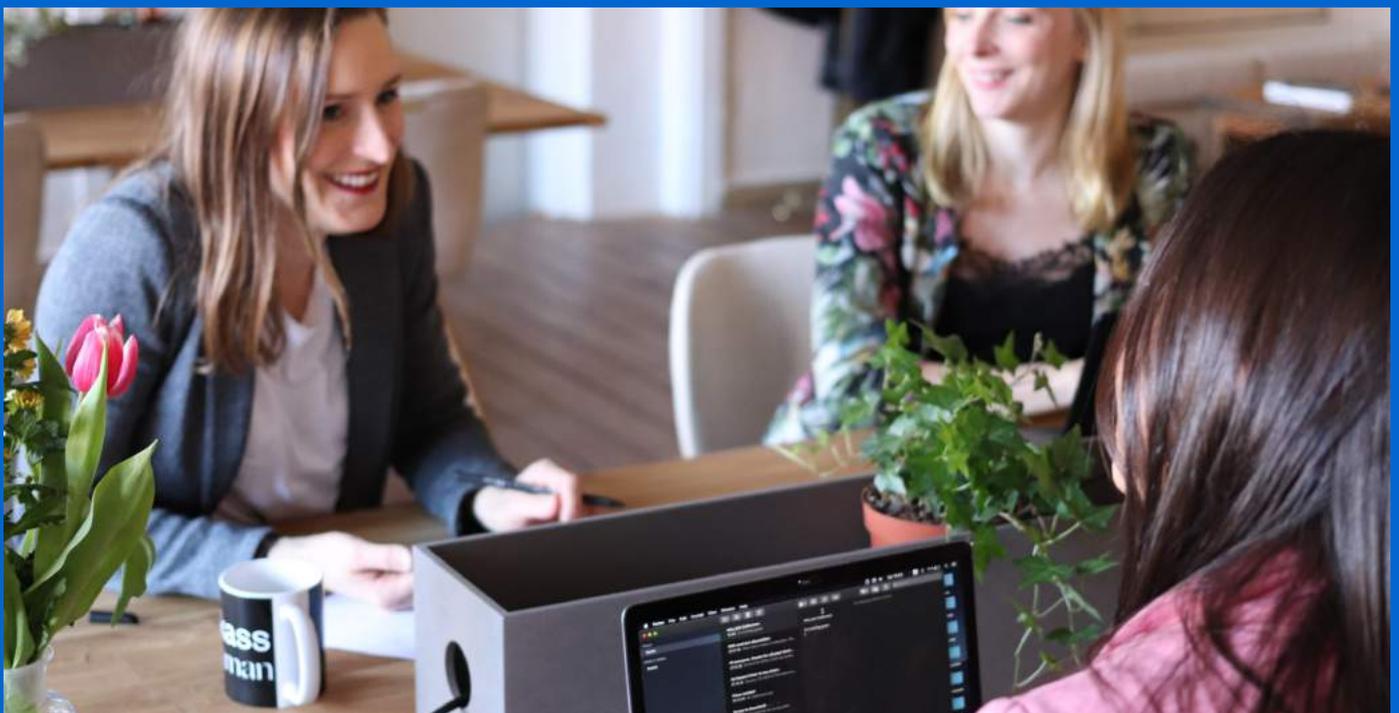


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# THE SOLUTION - A CUSTOMISABLE PROJECT MANAGEMENT APPROACH

What is the solution? How can public & third sector teams adopt a PM approach that works? Quite often, the answer lies with a simplified project management approach that:

- **'Lives' to the fundamental principles of project management methodologies but takes a more customisable approach to align very specifically with the organisation's aspirations:** e.g. focus on delivering quality project outputs; clarity of roles and responsibilities; an approach to managing risks that proactively helps address future problems; an approach to stakeholder management that works; and the use of the right information by the right people to aid both project leadership and delivery



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# THE SOLUTION - A CUSTOMISABLE PROJECT MANAGEMENT APPROACH

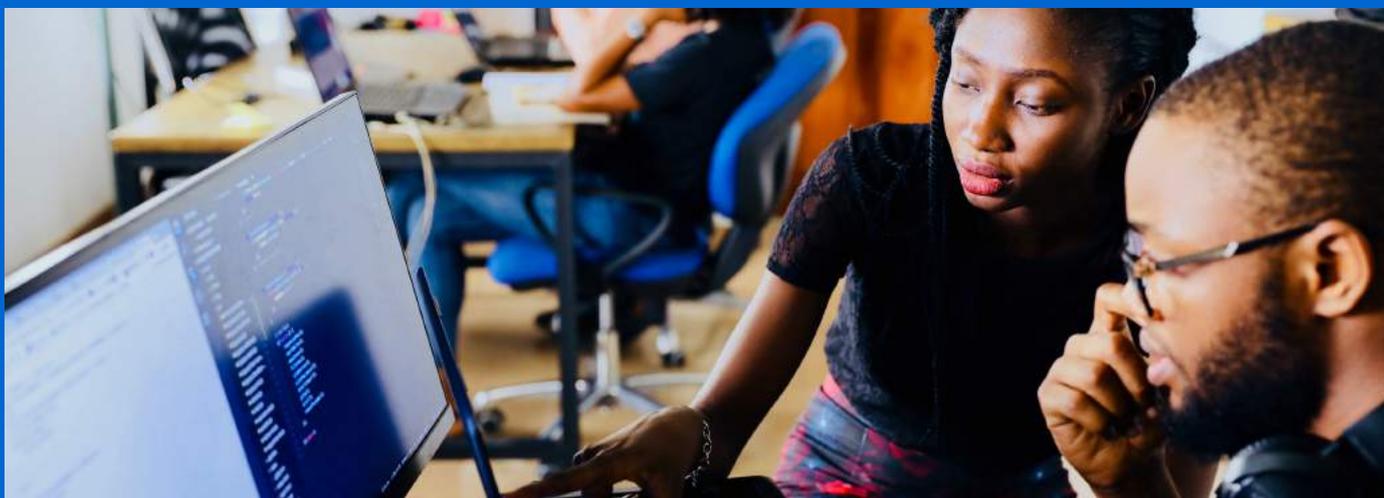
- **Helps develop project management competencies across the organisation** rather than simply making it the responsibility of a few people stuck in an office creating reports – for example:
  - **A leadership team** (e.g. a senior management team or a board of directors) that makes decisions supported by regular and accurate project information on all key projects' performance against cost, quality, scope, time and stakeholder management, as well as against corporate aspirations
  - **A management team that has in place user-friendly performance management mechanisms** allowing it to control projects continuously, providing the leadership team with the right information to help with decision-making and delivery teams with the right direction
  - **Delivery teams that deliver in a “tidy” manner** – i.e. based on an agreed scope, set out in plans and user-friendly documents that act as useful reference points throughout the project



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# THE SOLUTION - A CUSTOMISABLE PROJECT MANAGEMENT APPROACH

- **Is friendly to users in that it allows them to do their jobs in a better way** – it's not a distraction but a set of behaviours and tools that on a daily basis allow work-life to become a little easier and more effective
- **Is aligned to the organisation's ways of working** – for example, if the workforce is flexible, then the PM approach must be too
- **Above all else, is honest!** Good project management can work only if it helps people across the organisational hierarchy be honest (e.g. risks and issues cannot be managed if hidden) and positively proactive (they can also not be managed if all people do is raise them without recommending solutions!)



**The best project management approach is:**

~~PRINCE2~~

~~PMI~~

~~Lean~~



It's not about which PM methodology you choose. It's about what works best for your organisation and your team. When in doubt, commonsense is always the best approach!

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# PROJECT MANAGEMENT TIPS FOR TEAMS IN THE PUBLIC & THIRD SECTOR

- **Have a clear “change model” to support the start of a project** - be clear about the “why” before looking at “what”, “when”, “how” and by 'whom'
  - **Build cognitively diverse project teams** - bringing different perspectives together to solve a problem or achieve an aspiration significantly improves the chances of the team actually doing so
  - **Spend a good amount of time planning** - and not alone (see point above!)
  - **Learn from the lessons of previous projects** within the organisation and other work from which lessons can be learnt as part of the planning process
  - **Recognise that nothing can be forecasted with 100% certainty** for any project and put in place the right safeguards to manage changes and risks
  - **Ensure there is a project management methodology** including document and plan templates in place, which is aligned with the organisation’s ethos, way of work and adds value to delivery and management teams
  - **Use real-life case studies** within or outside the organisation to ensure teams understand and buy-in to the organisation’s methodology
  - From the outset, **define clearly the responsibilities** of a Project Executive and a Project Manager and give them time to do what they are supposed to
  - **Invest time in getting project team communications right** - ensure people know their roles and both formal and informal practices are in place to make teams work well together
  - **Keep challenging the project in a constructive way** - is the change model still relevant? Does the business case stack up? Do we have the right people in the right roles?
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## CASE STUDY - REFOCUSING PROJECT SUCCESS FOR A MAJOR UK CHARITY

**Dartington Service Design Lab**, one of the country's leading Research labs for children and young people, enlisted our help to review their project management capability through our Project Management Review service. The results? A driven team that is now successfully embedding Project Management in its day-to-day work. **Full case study:** <https://bit.ly/3dSXUgd>

*“ROI, through its project management review, allowed us to identify areas for improvement, develop easy to use project management templates and further focus on areas of strength. Christos alongside his co-trainers Amy and Mark were also great at making project management relevant and interesting to our work, and in doing so, helping us engage colleagues with improvement work across the organisation”*

**- Scotland Director, Social Research Unit.**



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# MEET THE TEAM

**ROI (ή) is a firm with more than 10 years' experience serving clients in the public sector and third sector, in the UK and internationally.**

Our passion is 'social good'.

We have helped our clients transform their operations, innovate their services and optimise their income generation models.

We work with an 'associate model', which means we bring in the right experts to suit each individual project we take on. Here are a few of our key associates:



**CHRISTOS PISHIAS**  
DIRECTOR  
PROJECT MANAGER & LEAD



**AMY LLOYD-HOULDEY**  
PROJECT MANAGER  
COMMS & RESEARCH  
PROFESSIONAL



**RAVI RAMLAKHAN**  
PROJECT MANAGER  
SENIOR CONSULTANT



**LEE RACHEL TOBIN**  
MARKETING  
LEAD



**ANDREAS DAMALIS**  
CONSULTANT  
CORPORATE  
STRUCTURING EXPERT

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## Our services \*including **NEW virtual training**\*

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## Blog

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