

Unique Aspects of *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide) – Seventh Edition*

1. Core Philosophy and Structure

- **Shift from process-based to principles-based standard [pg 11, 45]**
Earlier editions of PMBOK, as well as PRINCE2 and ISO, were heavily process-oriented—focusing on sequences of activities and deliverables. The 7th Edition is unique because it abandons this rigid process view and instead defines 12 broad **principles**. These act as guiding philosophies (like stewardship, tailoring, stakeholder engagement) that can be applied flexibly to any type of project, traditional or agile.
- **Performance Domains instead of Knowledge Areas [pg 86]**
Instead of grouping content into knowledge areas (like scope, cost, schedule), it introduces **eight performance domains** (Stakeholder, Team, Development Approach, Delivery, Measurement, Uncertainty, etc.). These domains interact as a **system of capabilities**—something PRINCE2 and ISO don't emphasize. This systemic design is unique to PMBOK 7.
- **System for Value Delivery [pg 33]**
PMBOK 7 positions projects as not just internal efforts but as **strategic drivers of value**. The “system for value delivery” connects projects to portfolios, programs, and operations—ensuring alignment with business strategy. This strategic systems view is unique compared to PRINCE2 (which is more about governance) and ISO (which focuses more on practices).

2. People, Team, and Stakeholder Engagement

- **Team Performance Domain [pg 94]**
While all standards mention teams, PMBOK 7 uniquely dedicates an entire domain to **how teams function**. It discusses project culture, psychological safety, leadership approaches, and emotional intelligence in detail. It treats teams not just as “resources” but as a living system that impacts outcomes.
- **Stakeholder Engagement Principle + Domain [pg 87]**
Engagement isn't just a task here—it's both a **principle** (guiding philosophy for all projects) and a **performance domain** with its own success measures. The uniqueness is that PMBOK 7 makes relationship-building and co-creation with stakeholders central to project success, whereas PRINCE2 limits stakeholders to governance roles (Business, User, Supplier).

3. Planning, Risk, and Tailoring

- **Uncertainty Performance Domain [pg 181]**
Other standards treat “risk” as a standalone area. PMBOK 7 broadens this by embedding risk inside the **Uncertainty Performance Domain**, which also covers ambiguity, complexity, and volatility. This holistic framing is unique—it forces project managers to think beyond measurable risks and consider unknowns, systemic complexity, and change volatility.
- **Tailoring as a dedicated section [pg 193]**
Tailoring has always been encouraged, but PMBOK 7 makes it **central and structured**. It includes a full top-level section that explains *how to tailor* step-by-step: assess context, design governance, adapt practices. Neither PRINCE2 nor ISO gives tailoring this much structured attention. This makes tailoring one of PMBOK 7’s defining unique elements.

4. Other Unique Elements

- **Models, Methods, and Artifacts Section [pg 211]**
Instead of prescribing one “right” tool, PMBOK 7 provides a **catalog-style toolkit** of commonly used models (like servant leadership), methods (like Kanban), and artifacts (like risk registers). This flexible “menu” approach is unique it empowers practitioners to choose rather than follow a strict template.
- **Integration with PMIstandards+™ [pg15]**
PMBOK 7 is the only standard that connects directly to a **digital, evolving platform** (PMIstandards+). This ensures the content is not static but continually updated with practices, examples, and case studies. Neither PRINCE2 nor ISO offers this living knowledge base.

Unique Aspects of Managing Successful Projects with PRINCE2® 7

1. Core Philosophy and Structure

- **Five Integrated Elements [pg 64]**
Unlike PMBOK or ISO, PRINCE2 organizes its guidance into **five integrated elements**: Principles, People, Practices, Processes, and Project Context. This is unique because “People” has now been elevated as a separate core element acknowledging that leadership, teamwork, communication, and organizational relationships are just as fundamental as processes and principles.
- **Seven Defined Processes [pg 236]**
PRINCE2 is unique for its **clear step-by-step process model** (e.g., “Starting up a project,” “Closing a project”). While PMBOK 7 moved away from prescriptive processes

and ISO focuses on practices, PRINCE2 stands out for keeping a **structured, linear process journey** through the project lifecycle. This makes it especially appealing for organizations wanting strict control and repeatability.

2. Governance, Stakeholders, and Performance

- **Four Management Layers [pg 95]**

PRINCE2 defines a governance structure with **four layers**: Commissioning, Directing, Managing, Delivering. This multilayered structure clarifies “who does what” at every level of authority. Neither PMBOK nor ISO provides governance in such a layered form.

- **Stakeholder Representation (Business, User, Supplier) [pg 94]**

Unlike PMBOK 7 (broad stakeholder focus) or ISO (sponsor/customer perspective), PRINCE2 assigns three **formal stakeholder roles** on its Project Board:

- **Business** (ensures project remains viable)
- **User** (ensures project meets end-user needs)
- **Supplier** (ensures technical delivery is possible).
This triad model of governance is unique to PRINCE2.

- **Sustainability as a Performance Target [pg 26]**

Uniquely, PRINCE2 treats **sustainability** as one of seven mandatory performance targets to manage, alongside cost, time, quality, benefits, risk, and scope. Neither PMBOK nor ISO elevate sustainability to this level of importance.

3. Practices and Management Products

- **Issues Practice (Change + Issue Management) [pg 187]**

PRINCE2 combines **change control and issue management** into a single integrated practice called “Issues,” with a 5-step structured technique. This unification is unique—ISO and PMBOK treat them separately.

- **Management Products [305]**

PRINCE2 uniquely formalizes **16 required management products** (documents such as the Business Case, Project Initiation Documentation). These products act as “control points” for governance and decision-making. The newest edition even adds a **Digital and Data Management Approach**, which provides structured guidance for how digital

tools and data will be managed throughout the project.

4. Commercial Context

- **Customer-Supplier Context [pg 28]**

Uniquely defines project context in terms of commercial customer-supplier relationship, providing specific guidance on adapting roles, plans, and practices when formal commercial agreement or contract exists. PMBOK and ISO acknowledge contracts, but PRINCE2 integrates this directly into its method.

Unique Aspects of ISO 21502:2020

1. Core Structure and Lifecycle

- **Two-Part Structure [pg 26, 34]**

ISO 21502 uniquely divides its guidance into two categories:

- **Integrated project management practices** (covering the entire lifecycle)
- **Management practices for a project** (specific functional areas).
This dual-structure makes it easier to separate lifecycle guidance from specialized practices, something PMBOK and PRINCE2 don't do in the same way.

- **Pre-Project and Post-Project Activities [pg 34]**

ISO 21502 uniquely formalizes what happens **before and after a project**:

- *Pre-project*: ensuring justification, feasibility, and organizational readiness.
- *Post-project*: verifying sustainability of outcomes and benefits realization.
PRINCE2 has a closure stage, and PMBOK discusses benefits, but neither standard formalizes pre/post activities as explicit lifecycle stages.

2. Governance, Accountability, and Context

- **Dedicated Governance Framework [pg 17]**

ISO 21502 provides a **full governance framework** that clarifies how projects should be authorized, directed, and controlled. It uniquely assigns **clear accountability to the**

Project Sponsor for achieving objectives. While PRINCE2 and PMBOK mention sponsors, ISO makes sponsor accountability explicit and central.

- **Customer-Supplier Perspective [pg 15]**

Like PRINCE2, ISO 21502 recognizes customer-supplier relationships, but it does so differently: it emphasizes how **governance and team structures should adapt when both parties are involved**. This makes ISO 21502 broader and more adaptable across industries.

3. Specific Management Practices

- **Societal Change as a Management Practice [pg 49]**

ISO 21502 is unique in explicitly including **societal change** (not just organizational change) as a management practice. This recognizes that some projects (government, infrastructure, public health) affect society at large and must consider long-term social impact. Neither PRINCE2 nor PMBOK frame change management this broadly.

4. Organizational Preparedness

- **Prerequisites for Formalizing Project Management [pg 24]**

ISO 21502 uniquely guides organizations on what to consider **before even formalizing project management practices**. It covers organizational maturity, readiness for structured governance, and the ability to absorb change. This is absent in PMBOK and PRINCE2, which assume the project environment already exists.