Comparison of PM Standards: PMBOK 7 vs PRINCE2 vs ISO 21500/21502

This document provides a structured comparison of three global project management standards:
- PMBOK® Guide — Seventh Edition
- Managing Successful Projects with PRINCE2® (7th Edition)
- ISO 21500:2021 and ISO 21502:2020 (treated as one standard)

The comparison highlights similarities, differences, and unique elements across key project management topics.

Comparison: PMBOK 7 vs PRINCE2 (7th ed) vs ISO 21500/21502

(Treated as: PMBOK 7 | PRINCE2 7 | ISO = ISO 21500 + ISO 21502)

Sources:

- PMBOK® Guide — Seventh Edition (Principles + Performance Domains + Tailoring). 毅filecite孿turn1file0傢

- Managing Successful Projects with PRINCE2® (7th ed). 毅filecite孿turn1file1傢

- ISO 21500:2021 (Context & Concepts) and ISO 21502:2020 (Guidance on project management). 毅filecite孿turn1file5傢

NOTE: Where useful I cite the exact clauses/topics referenced in the standards (section numbers as shown in each PDF). Use these citations to deep-link within your repo or viewer.

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1) High-level approach / structure

- PMBOK 7: Principles-based standard (12 principles) + eight Project Performance Domains; systems view and outcomes/value focus. Emphasizes tailoring and models/methods/artifacts. **(page number 45 for principles , 86 for Domains)**

- PRINCE2: Method-based (integrated elements = Principles, Practices, Processes) with a product-focused planning approach, explicit roles (Project Board, Executive, Senior User/Supplier) and stage-based control. **(Page 38 principles, page 68 practices, page 232)**

- ISO (21500 /21502): ISO 21500 gives context/concepts; ISO 21502 provides guidance and detailed management practices (clauses 7.x cover planning, risk, scope, quality, procurement, etc.). ISO takes a high-level process/practice approach aligned to organizational governance. **(Page 35 for 21502)**

Similarities (high level):

- All three require explicit governance, role clarity, planning, risk and change management, stakeholder engagement, and alignment to organizational strategy. 毅filecite孿turn1file6孿turn1file1孿turn1file5傢

Major difference (high level):

- PMBOK 7 is principles + performance-domain oriented (outcomes-focused); PRINCE2 is a prescriptive method with defined practices/processes and named roles; ISO combines context (21500) with practice guidance (21502) and is intentionally neutral/adoptable by organizations. 毅filecite孿turn1file6孿turn1file13孿turn1file5傢

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2) Governance & Roles
- PMBOK 7: Describes organizational governance systems and functions associated with projects; encourages tailoring of governance to context. **(pg 36,40)**

- PRINCE2: Strong governance model—explicit Project Board, project executive, clear accountabilities, manage-by-exception (tolerances) and directing-process. **(pg 93)**

- ISO: Defines governance, governing body and project governance framework; aligns project governance with organizational strategy and oversight. **(pg 17 for 21502, pg 13 for 21500)**

Similarities:

- Need for defined accountability, escalation routes, and oversight. 毅filecite孿turn1file6孿turn1file13孿turn1file5傢

Differences / Unique:

- PRINCE2 prescribes named roles and the manage-by-exception mechanism (tolerances). filecite turn1file13

- PMBOK 7 is less prescriptive about specific job titles and more about functions and behaviors (principles-driven). filecite turn1file6

- ISO frames governance at organizational level (alignment with strategy and integrated governance). filecite turn1file5

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3) Tailoring & Adaptation
- PMBOK 7: Dedicated Tailoring section; tailoring driven by principles, organizational values and project context; recommends PMIstandards+ for context-specific practices. **(pg 193)**

- PRINCE2: Explicit principle "Tailor to suit the project"; tailoring decisions captured in initiation docs and approved by Project Board; practical guidance on what/how to tailor **(pg 48, 66)**

- ISO: Emphasizes selecting approaches based on organizational/contextual considerations; ISO 21502 advises on how to adapt management practices to project context. **(pg 26 for 21502)**

Similarities:

- All require tailoring to project size, complexity, delivery method, risk, and organizational environment. filecite turn1file10 turn1file1 turn1file5

Differences:

- PRINCE2 expects formal tailoring decisions to be approved by governance (Project Board) and captured in initiation documentation. filecite turn1file14

- PMBOK focuses on tailoring guided by principles and provides a catalog of models/methods (less prescriptive about approval steps). filecite turn1file10

- ISO focuses on organizational selection criteria and alignment; less prescriptive about specific approval gates (left to organizational practice). filecite turn1file5

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4) Stakeholder Engagement

- PMBOK 7: Stakeholder Performance Domain — identification, analysis, engagement strategies and continuous alignment. **(pg 89,52, 87)**

- PRINCE2: Emphasizes people and stakeholder groups; communications practice; roles such as Senior User to represent stakeholders. **(pg 43)**

- ISO: Stakeholder management is a management practice (ISO 21502 clause 7.12) — identify, engage and manage stakeholder expectations. **(pg 47 book 21502)**

Similarities:

- Systematic identification, ongoing engagement, and use of stakeholder analysis to inform decisions. 毇filecite孿turn1file10孿turn1file13孿turn1file5傢

Differences:

- PRINCE2 assigns stakeholder representation into formal roles (Senior User/Supplier) and links to project assurance; PMBOK treats stakeholder engagement as a cross-cutting performance domain; ISO connects stakeholders to organizational governance and strategy. 毇filecite孿turn1file13孿turn1file10孿turn1file5傢

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5) Risk Management

- PMBOK 7: Treats risk within the Uncertainty Performance Domain and promotes optimizing risk responses; references broader PMI risk materials and a principles-based approach. **(pg 243)**

- PRINCE2: Dedicated Risk practice—risk management approach, risk register, risk budget, owners and action owners; explicit techniques and management products. **(pg 168,**

- ISO (21502): Risk management practice (7.8) — identify, assess, treat and control risks; consistent with ISO risk terminology and processes. **(pg 42 book 21502)**

Similarities:

- All require identification, assessment (probability & impact), assignment of owners, planned responses, monitoring and communication.
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Differences / Unique:

- PRINCE2 explicitly uses "threats" and "opportunities" language and prescribes management products like Risk Register and Risk Management Approach (with templates and content guidance). 毂filecite孿turn1file9傢

- PMBOK 7 frames risk within a broader "uncertainty" domain and favors optimizing responses across the performance system rather than fixed processes. 毂filecite孿turn1file6傢

- ISO provides structured steps similar to PRINCE2 but positions them as guidance aligned with ISO risk principles and often referenced to ISO 31000 practice. 毂filecite孿turn1file5孿turn1file13傢

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6) Planning (scope/schedule/cost)

- PMBOK 7: Planning Performance Domain — planning variables, communication, procurement, changes, metrics and alignment; supports multiple delivery cadences and life cycles. **(pg 124)**

- PRINCE2: Plans practice — product-based planning, relationship between project/stage/team plans; stage boundaries and manage-by-stages. **(pg 118)**

- ISO: Includes planning practice (7.2) plus dedicated clauses for schedule (7.6) and cost (7.7). **(pg 30 21502)**

Similarities:

- Progressive elaboration, baseline and control, and alignment of plans with the business case. 毂filecite孿turn1file6孿turn1file13孿turn1file5傢

Differences:

- PRINCE2 mandates product-based planning and uses stage plans + work packages to control delivery. 毂filecite孿turn1file13傢

- PMBOK supports a range of planning styles (predictive → adaptive) and emphasizes tailoring plans to delivery cadence. 毂filecite孿turn1file6傢

- ISO offers prescriptive clause-level guidance for schedule and cost processes (7.6 / 7.7) oriented for organizational adoption. 毂filecite孿turn1file5傢

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7) Scope & Requirements / Product focus

- PMBOK 7: Focus on outcomes and deliverables inside performance domains; scope is controlled within planning and project work. **(pg 53)**

- PRINCE2: Very product-focused (product descriptions drive scope, quality, acceptance). Product Breakdown Structure and Product Flow Diagrams are core techniques. **(26)**

- ISO: Scope management as a discrete practice (7.4) — define, control, confirm scope delivery. 毅filecite孯turn1file5傢 **(pg 38 for 21502, pg 7 for 21500)**

Similarities:

- All require formal definition, control and confirmation of scope/deliverables. 毅filecite孯turn1file6孯turn1file3孯turn1file5傢

Differences:

- PRINCE2's explicit "product" artifacts are unique in their centrality to planning and acceptance; PMBOK is more outcome/value oriented; ISO lays out standard processes for scope management. 毅filecite孯turn1file3孯turn1file6孯turn1file5傢

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8) Quality Management

- PMBOK 7: Principle to "Build quality into processes and deliverables" and Delivery Performance Domain includes quality topics. 毅filecite孯turn1file6傢 **(pg 242)**

- PRINCE2: Dedicated Quality practice with product quality lifecycle and quality register / review techniques. 毅filecite孯turn1file13傢 **(pg 149)**

- ISO: Quality management practice (7.11) — plan, assure, control quality. 毅filecite孯turn1file5傢 **(pg 45 for 21502)**

Similarities:

- Plan → assure → control cycles; integrate quality into project lifecycle rather than as a separate afterthought. 毅filecite孯turn1file6孯turn1file13孯turn1file5傢

Differences / Unique:

- PRINCE2 emphasises product quality checks and product-based acceptance criteria; PMBOK gives a broader set of models/methods to choose from; ISO maps quality activities to a standard process model. 毅filecite學turn1file13學turn1file6學turn1file5傢

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9) Change Control & Issues
- PMBOK 7: Addresses change across planning and project work; tailoring determines specific control mechanisms. 毅filecite學turn1file6傢 **(pg 227)**

- PRINCE2: Issues & change control practice — change proposals, issue registers, formal process for assessing/deciding on changes with clear responsibilities. 毅filecite學turn1file13傢 **(pg 186,270)**

- ISO: Change control guidance (7.10) — establish framework, identify and assess change requests, plan implementation and closure. 毅filecite學turn1file5傢 **(pg 30,43 for 21502)**

Similarities:

- Formal request/assessment/approval/implementation/closure lifecycle for changes; linkage to business case and plan adjustments.
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Differences:

- PRINCE2 provides detailed roles and templates for issues/change handling; PMBOK leaves the specific mechanism to tailoring and the project's chosen approach; ISO provides clause-level steps to adopt. 毅filecite學turn1file13學turn1file6學turn1file5傢

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10) Benefits & Business Case
- PMBOK 7: Focus on value delivery and outcomes (system for value delivery); business-case thinking embedded in principles. 毅filecite學turn1file6傢 **(pg 279)**

- PRINCE2: Business Case practice is central; evolves through life cycle and is the basis for continued justification of the project. 毀filecite孿turn1file13傢 **(pg 31, 74)**

- ISO: Benefits management practice (7.3) — identify, analyse, monitor, maintain benefits in alignment with strategy. 毀filecite孿turn1file5傢 **(pg 17,36 for 21502, pg 7,16 for 2100)**

Similarities:

- Business case / benefits must be defined, monitored and used to justify/terminate projects. 毀filecite孿turn1file6孿turn1file13孿turn1file5傢

Differences:

- PRINCE2's lifecycle explicitly ties business case updates to stage boundaries and approvals; PMBOK treats benefits as part of the overall value-delivery system; ISO provides structured benefit management activities. 毀filecite孿turn1file13孿turn1file6孿turn1file5傢

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11) Communications & Reporting

- PMBOK 7: Communication integrated across Planning & Project Work domains; emphasizes adapting to cadence and stakeholders. 毀filecite孿turn1file6傢 **(pg 137)**

- PRINCE2: Communications integrated into Organizing and Plans practices; includes standard management products (highlight reports, checkpoint reports). 毀filecite孿turn1file13傢 **(pg 61)**

- ISO: Communication management practice (7.13) — plan, distribute, monitor impact. 毀filecite孿turn1file5傢 **(pg 48,50 for 21502)**

Similarities:

- Plan communications, select formats/cadence, monitor impact. 毀filecite孿turn1file6孿turn1file13孿turn1file5傢

Differences:

- PRINCE2 offers a set of named report types and templates; PMBOK provides models and tailoring guidance; ISO provides standard process steps for planning and reporting. 毅filecite孛turn1file13孛turn1file6孛turn1file5傢

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12) Procurement & Contracts

- PMBOK 7: Procurement appears as part of Planning performance domain and Project Work considerations. 毅filecite孛turn1file6傢 **(pg 138,247)**

- PRINCE2: Supplier side is formalized (Senior Supplier role); procurement aspects integrated into organizing, plans and quality practices. 毅filecite孛turn1file13傢 **(pg 109,28)**

- ISO: Procurement management practice (7.17) — plan procurement, evaluate/select suppliers, administer and close contracts. 毅filecite孛turn1file5傢 **(pg 51,52 for 21502)**

Similarities:

- Plan → select → administer → close lifecycle; alignment with project objectives. 毅filecite孛turn1file6孛turn1file13孛turn1file5傢

Differences:

- PRINCE2's governance/role model assigns formal supplier representation and assurance roles; PMBOK focuses on procurement processes within the project context; ISO prescribes clause-level procurement steps. 毅filecite孛turn1file13孛turn1file6孛turn1file5傢

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13) Lessons Learned & Continuous Improvement

- PMBOK 7: Learning throughout the project; measurement and feedback (Measurement domain) and PMIstandards+ for ongoing practices. 毅filecite孛turn1file6傢 **(pg 142,279)**

- PRINCE2: Principle "Learn from experience" and explicit techniques to capture lessons and feed them into tailoring and future projects. 毅filecite孛turn1file13傢 **(pg 41)**

- ISO: Lessons learned appears as a practice (7.18) — identify, disseminate lessons. 毅filecite孛turn1file5傢 **(pg 52 for 21502)**

Similarities:

- Capture, disseminate and apply lessons to improve future projects and tailoring choices. 毂filecite學turn1file6學turn1file13學turn1file5傢

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14) Measurement, Performance & Uncertainty

- PMBOK 7: Dedicated Measurement domain and Uncertainty domain (includes risk, complexity, ambiguity). Emphasizes outcomes-based measures. 毂filecite學turn1file6傢 **(pg 160,86,208)**

- PRINCE2: Progress practice with tolerance reporting, highlight/exception reports and metrics for stage control. 毂filecite學turn1file13傢 **(pg 25)**

- ISO: Reporting (7.15) and guidance for monitoring project performance and reporting outputs. 毂filecite學turn1file5傢 **(pg 30 for 21502)**

Similarities:

- Define what to measure, use measures for decision-making and governance, handle uncertainty explicitly. 毂filecite學turn1file6學turn1file13學turn1file5傢

Differences:

- PMBOK provides a performance-domain view and wider set of measures; PRINCE2 prescribes management products/reports and tolerances for exception handling; ISO maps reporting to standardized processes. 毂filecite學turn1file6學turn1file13學turn1file5傢