Guidance to the PMO – PMBOK or PRINCE2

Introduction: The following comparison would be handy for an organization and its PMO to decide whether to go the PMBOK or PRINCE2 way in implementing project management best practices

Comparison:

Parameter	PMBOK	PRINCE2
Business Case Alignment	PMBOK understands and realizes the importance of business case for a project and ensures that the business case must be validated before a project is taken over, however a detailed guidance of business case development and maintenance throughout the project is a bit overlooked in the literature of PMBOK.	PRINCE2 provides an explicit principle which is universally applied to all the projects, every project must be business case driven, which means if the business case does not remain valid during at any point of execution of the project, the project is liable to be stopped. PRINCE2 clearly provides the path for business case development maintenance and also provides the guidance for benefits realization from projects, which are normally realized only after completion of the project.
Learn from Experiences	PMBOK mentions the concept of lessons learnt and use of those lessons in future projects; however the detailed guidance is left to the wisdom and maturity of the organization.	PRINCE2 at every stage of project review emphasizes the lessons log and updating the lessons report with Quality Assurance or the PMO on completion of the projects for use in future projects
Defined Roles and Responsibilities	Throughout the PMBOK literature PMBOK provides the expectations from various roles in the project team however it does not mention the clear job descriptions, and the project managers have to struggle documenting the job descriptions.	Appendix C of the PRINCE2 official manual clearly provides the list of required competencies and responsibilities of every role in project. This guidance comes very handy when an organization wishes to document the JDs (Job Descriptions) of team members

Plan / Manage by Stages	PMBOK emphasis of project planning and provides the concept of project management plan with its subsidiary plans related to time, cost, quality, scope, risks etc. However the PMBOK's approach to planning definitely requires a project manager to be skilled and experienced in planning; one good concept advocated in PMBOK is Rolling Wave Planning.	PRINCE2 has a slightly simpler approach to planning, it advocates product based planning method where understanding the product of the project is important before planning can be done. Once the product is understood it is easier for the project manager and technical expert to advise in planning. Planning in PRINCE2 happens stage by stage and the planning happens close to the events and it is not necessary to plan each and everything in the beginning.
Mgmt Control and Escalation	PMBOK assumes considerable authority to the project manager; in fact in projectized organizations it assumes almost full authority to the project manager which could rarely be a case. It may be a challenge for an organization to decide which project organization they should choose i.e. a functional or a matrix or projectized organization, and defining the level of control in each of these different organization types is also a challenge	PRINCE2 does not confuse itself over the authority and power of the project manager since most of the things happening here are process oriented. An organization can easily decide a higher level of control and frequent reviews (i.e. more number of stages) for complex, risky projects or projects with a less experienced project manager while a lesser level of control and reviews may be applied in case of simple projects or projects with skilled and experienced project managers.
Product Focus	PMBOK plans on the philosophy of work breakdown structure and the WBS is broken further in to activities; a product focus seems to be missing in PMBOK	PRINCE2 is product focused, before a plan is made, it is clearly understood, what is the product of the project. This approach to planning seems more appealing and provides a better estimation of the project. The team also understands well, what they are supposed to make
Tailoring	PMBOK does not give much importance to	Tailoring is one of the 7 principles of PRINCE2 and the

Guidance to the PMO – PMBOK or PRINCE2

	tailoring and advocates a detailed guidance on how the projects should be managed, irrespective of the size of the project.	process to tailor is easy to implement. PRINCE2 understands that for simpler projects the process overhead does not make any sense.
Agility / Flexibility	PMBOK is less matured as far as agility is concerned. In the recent release of version 6.0 of PMBOK only a generic guidance is suggested for agility, which is bit difficult to comprehend and implement.	With its Manage by Stages principle PRINCE2 is more agile where each stage could be considered as a sprint. Applying the Agile good practices of time boxing, Kanban, product backlog grooming etc, PRINCE2 method can easily adopt to Agile environments.
PMO Role	An organization must carefully choose a role for the PMO, controlling, directive or supportive as per the PMBOK guidance.	Since the projects are more in control of project board the PMO role may be very specified limited to providing guidance, lessons learnt and auditing of the projects.
Theory Vs Practice	PMBOK provides a lot theory which may be difficult to comprehend for a practicing project manager. A heavy dependence is there in PMBOK on the wisdom of project manager i.e. Expert Judgment as one of the important technique to be used by a project manager which requires that a project manager must have significant project management experience	PRINCE2 is crisp and provides very specific documented guidance to the practice of project management. There have been many instances where even less experienced project managers were given the responsibility of managing projects through the structured method of PRINCE2 and a controlled direction was provided to these budding project managers to be able to execute the projects and achieve the desired objectives.
Management Products Templates	PMBOK does not provide any templates for management products i.e. the project plan, weekly reports, risk register etc	Appendix A of PRINCE2 manual provides detailed templates of the management products used in PRINCE2 methodology and these templates may be tailored as per the organizations' needs.
Processes Definition	Processes and activities are highly elaborative in PMBOK guidance. It provides	PRINCE2 provides a to the point description of various processes and activities. PRINCE2 recommends only 7

	elaboration of 47 processes related to the 10 knowledge areas.	processes in the methodology. Few of them are executed only once while few of them are executed multiple times in a project
Project Monitoring and Control	Project Monitoring and control is mostly left in the hands of project manager and PMO in case of PMBOK	PRINCE2 strongly recommends a project board representing the three interests in a projects i.e. User, Supplier and Business. The project board provides overall control to the project through the process named 'Directing a Project'
Implementation Considerations	Applying PMBOK in full can be a challenge and it takes organizational maturity. A good research is required on the organization's part to select or develop the policies, processes, roles etc which may be suitable to the needs of the organization.	Simpler implementation, once the training has been provided to all members, a core group requires more intense guidance on how to use PRINCE2 manual in addition to defining the roles, responsibilities and processes for various stakeholders i.e. PMO, Project Board, Project Mangers, Project Team Members etc
Project Management Auditing	PMBOK does not provide any specific auditing tool and the organization needs to carefully design the audit checklist.	Appendix E of PRINCE2 manual provides a comprehensive audit checklist which can be applied on any type of the project to check the health of the project
Employee Orientation / Training	Slightly complex and time consuming, it would take at least a week's time for orientation and minimum two weeks time for PMBOK implementation related training.	Easy and straight forward, applies to all project team members, orientation can be achieved in two days while a suggested Open Book guidance can be achieved within a week's time

Recommendation: From the above comparison table, the author may appear as bit biased towards PRINCE2, however the above opinion of the author is based on the years of experience of training, consulting and implementation of projects using PMBOK and PRINCE2 guidance. We believe that PMBOK has many good practices which seem to have been overlooked in the PRINCE2 guidance, and we recommend an organization to definitely make use of those good practices along with PRINCE2 guidance.