



# A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK®), 4th edition

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# A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge

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(PMBOK®), 4<sup>th</sup> edition

The 4<sup>th</sup> edition of A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (popularly known as the PMBOK) was issued in 2008 and PMP examinations based upon this edition will begin on July 1, 2009. As the source for the overwhelming majority of the material covered on the test, it is imperative for prospective PMPs who have some familiarity with the older 3<sup>rd</sup> edition to retool their thinking to bring it in line with the changed text. Likewise, current PMPs who tested on the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition should make themselves aware of the changes in order to stay current with the process terminology that will soon follow in organizations that wish to be fully PMBOK compliant.

The major changes to the PMBOK are:

- 1) The adoption of the verb-noun format for process names
- 2) Amplification as to Enterprise Environmental Factors and Organizational Process Assets
- 3) Clarifications as to the relationships between Corrective Actions, Preventative Actions, Defect Repairs, and Requested changes
- 4) The elimination, addition, and consolidation of processes to tighten the logic of the process groups
- 5) A division of the Project Management Plan documents from Project Documents that was unclear in the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the PMBOK
- 6) The establishment of a distinction between the elements of a Project Charter from the Project Scope Statement
- 7) The elimination of process flow diagrams that were often interpreted as activity diagrams rather than logical flows
- 8) More emphasis on the logical connections between the processes (where outputs become inputs to follow-on processes)
- 9) An appendix that is intended to emphasize the need for soft (interpersonal) skills

## Verb-Noun Format

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The standardization of the name format for the processes, while not a major change, was indicative of a general move to force consistency between the nine knowledge areas. The Project Management Institute is, in many ways, an academic-like organization. That means that decisions are reached by consensus, and it is at least arguable that there was too much consensus and too little direction by the editors when it come to things such as the standardization of tools, the naming of processes, and the use of inputs. For example, most

processes in a knowledge area use the subsidiary management plan for that area as an input. But sometimes, for no apparent reason, there were unexplained exceptions. The across-the-board standardization of the 4<sup>th</sup> edition is very welcome improvement and serves to make the PMBOK more logically consistent.

## Enterprise Environmental Factors/Organizational Process Assets

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The 3<sup>rd</sup> edition PMBOK freely used Enterprise Environmental Factors and Organizational Process Assets as inputs for many of the processes. Obviously the vast range of processes implied a great deal of depth in these two inputs, but the explanations given in the early chapters were not sufficient to support all of these uses. The expansion of these two inputs respective definitions gives more academic rigor to the terms, but probably will not be considered of great importance to most project managers.

## Corrective Actions / Preventive Actions / Defect Repairs / Change Requests

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One way of looking at how these four outputs (and subsequent inputs) differed was to think about the difference between short-term and long-term management actions. In this scheme, Corrective Actions, Preventive Actions, and Defect Repairs can be thought of as those actions necessary to keep a project on track (i.e., short-term, day-to-day management actions), while Change Requests are actions necessary to change the direction of the project (i.e., long-term, strategic action).

Under the new PMI scheme, Corrective Actions, Preventive Actions, and Defect Repairs have become variations of Change Requests. In other words, a Change Request may still be used to increase or decrease the scope of a project (long-term, strategic action), but it can also mean the mundane day-to-day actions of running a project (Corrective Actions, Preventive Actions, and Defect Repairs). In addition, “Updates” has been added as another category. These represent just that, updates to the content of documents, plans, etc.

Whether this change helps practitioners may be open to question, but it certainly reduces the number of inputs and outputs that a would-be PMP must memorize for the examination.

## Processes

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The major changes in the processes themselves were as follows:

- The elimination of the “Develop Preliminary Project Scope Statement” process
- The addition of the “Identify Stakeholders” process
- The substitution of the “Collect Requirements” process for the “Scope Planning” process

- The consolidation of the “Plan Purchases and Acquisitions” and the “Plan Contracting” processes into the “Plan Procurements” process
- The consolidation of the “Request Seller Responses” and “Select Sellers” processes into the “Conduct Procurements” process
- The move of the Manage the Project Team from the Monitoring and Controlling Process Group to the Executing Process Group
- The move of the Manage Stakeholder Expectations from the Monitoring and Controlling Process Group to the Executing Process Group

The elimination of the Preliminary Project Scope Statement has so far elicited the most comment from project managers. Comments have ranged from “I’ll do it anyway” to “I’ll include it in the Charter” to “I never did it anyway.” The best way of thinking about this change may be that it reflects a concerted effort to start distinguishing between Business Analysis processes (during Initiation) and project scope planning (during planning). Regardless, it seems clear that future editions of the PMBOK are going to have to confront more directly the growing standardization of Business Analysis tools and processes being developed under that profession’s own BA Body of Knowledge.

Most project management professors and instructors have long taught that stakeholder analysis is the first step in communications planning. Thus the “Identify Stakeholders” process added under Communications Management in the Initiating Process Group is a needed change to better illustrate the connection between stakeholders and project communications management.

The “Collect Requirements” process helps to present a more detailed understanding of requirements gathering in developing the project’s scope. And again, the ultimate reconciliation of the BABOK with the PMBOK would seem to be a logical necessity.

The least consistent knowledge area, at least in terms of process naming, was Procurement Management. Anyone who has ever sat for the PMP exam probably remembers this area’s inconsistent and confusing nomenclature. This was an over-due change.

Finally, the “Mange Stakeholders” process’s becoming the “Manage Stakeholder Expectations” seems to be a more proactive approach to stakeholder management than was evidenced by the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. In this respect, it is also more in keeping with how project management is normally taught to new practitioners and serves to make the PMBOK more relevant to real world management.

## Project Management Plan / Project Documents

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One difficult to understand feature of the PMBOK third edition was its explanation of the documents that should or could be included in a Project Management Plan. On cursory inspection, it appeared that just about any document was fair game to being included.

The division of the Project Management Plan from all these other working documents (now referred to as Project Documents) and the subsequent clarification of the Project Management Plan's content (baselines and subsidiary management plans) clears up this confusing situation, much to the PMBOKs improvement.

Incidentally, the PMBOK now refers to the three baselines as the Scope Baseline (still made up of the Project Scope Statement, the WBS, and the WBS Dictionary), the Schedule Baseline, and the Cost Performance Baseline.

## Project Charter / Project Scope Statement

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The emphasis change in the Charter becomes apparent upon reviewing the bullet items presented in the PMBOK as to what a charter includes. The term "High Level" is used in three of the bullets and "Summary" in two. The remaining five bullets describe administrative items (approvals, authority) or background.

## Process Flow Diagrams

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The Process Flow Diagrams in the third edition were not helpful in understanding just what was happening in the respective process groups. For example, the Planning flow diagram was at odds with the stated process inputs of that process group, while the Executing diagram was just confusing. Most prospective PMPs thought that what they were looking at was an activity flow diagram, and they therefore thought they could transfer these diagrams into a PERT/CPM network for accomplishing their project. More than a few instructors gave their students corrected diagrams, or even told their students to ignore the diagrams altogether. Their removal should be welcome news to anyone trying to understand the PMI methodology.

## Logical Connections between Processes

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Each of the processes (as presented in their respective knowledge area chapters) now includes a diagram showing the data flow (inputs) to the process, specifically identifying the source of that input. In some cases, this diagram comes perilously close to information overload (as in the "Develop Project Management Plan" process), but on the whole these diagrams serve the very useful function of illustrating the connections and feedback loops that connect the various processes.

## Interpersonal Skills

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The Interpersonal Skills appendix (Appendix G) is a start at recognizing the importance of these skills in project success, but at present the appendix seems too general and lacking in specifics to be of any real value. If PMI stays with the appendix in its next (fifth) edition, look for a considerable “beefing up” of this material.

## Conclusion

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As with most edition changes, the authors tweaked definitions here and there, sometimes resulting in clarification, many times making changes that appear simply cosmetic. But on the whole, the 4<sup>th</sup> edition was a definite improvement on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. The update went a long way towards tightening up the logic of the work as well as supplying some much needed consistency to everything from simple wording to inputs, tools and techniques, and outputs. The substantive changes to the processes themselves were in keeping with the way the profession is actually taught and practiced, and this alone makes the 4<sup>th</sup> edition a much better document.