

A scenic view of a town in Bergen, Norway, with colorful buildings and a forested hillside in the background. The image is partially obscured by a dark blue diagonal overlay.

# The digital transformation of project management at the University of Bergen

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## 1. Introduction

The University of Bergen (UiB) is an internationally recognized research university, located in the heart of Bergen, Norway. UiB promotes academic diversity which has become a cornerstone to our objective to seek, develop and cultivate knowledge.

## 2. Background

There are close to 18,500 students at the university, including around 2,000 international students, all studying across a wide variety of subjects, such as Medicine, Mathematics, Law, Humanities, Fine Art, Music, and Design. We employ more than 5,000 faculty and staff along with PhD candidates who are paid employees.

As the University has grown, it has become more difficult to manage and deliver projects, which sometimes led to time, cost, scope, risk, quality, and benefits issues. We decided we needed a solid and robust project framework and culture to consolidate our project approach and success.

Our 2016-2022 digitalization strategy stated that our ambition was to become a university with a highly developed digital service in teaching and education. To achieve this, we had to create a professional project department alongside a new digital project management platform, while also transforming and changing the way we work.

In 2017, our CIO initiated an organizational change resulting in a new business unit: the Project Division, (our equivalent of a Project Management Office), which sat as a part of the IT department. The goal was to professionalize our project and portfolio management and to achieve more successful project delivery through a common framework and by building a strong project culture.

When Covid-19 hit, it triggered a digital change overnight, which required a shift towards digital project management that was still able to build upon the work from previous years.

## 3. Aims and objectives

It's not easy to introduce new collaborative ways of working into a large university. Our aim is to deliver successful projects, on time, on budget, with desired outcomes and benefits, according to end user expectations. As a university, we acknowledged that some projects have vague scheduling and no clear deadlines.

We set out objectives that describe where and what we wanted to be:

- Being professional in the way we work on projects and processes.
- Introduce a common project language.
- Improving the way we work by increasing the possibility for successful delivery.
- Better benefits realization.
- Increase skills and knowledge through training and certifications in project management.
- Build a solid platform of digital project elements using tools such as Office 365, Teams, Planner, as well as a project platform built on Sharepoint.
- Pursuing a practical approach to portfolio management.
- Tailoring PRINCE2 to suit a university environment by simplifying the project management process.



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## 4. Approach

Our transformation began almost five years ago. In the beginning, what was then our Project Division (PMO) consisted only of a few colleagues from the IT department. We grew to become a large cross-departmental group as we established the PMO, and strengthened the Project Portfolio Management Office (PPMO) with a representative from the PMO.

Our work was led by the need to innovate, create, develop and implement a new digital project management platform and portal. 'Learning by doing' describes how we moved forward, building a new cultural understanding, organizational maturity, skills, and knowledge.

Our approach was to start with a light tailored framework and methodology, which demanded less of the project managers. Our philosophy was to be pragmatic. Similarly, the functionality and complexity of the digital platform was stripped to a minimum, making the onboarding of new and inexperienced (or critically minded) project managers and participants easier. More experienced project managers knew what was missing and could activate the advanced functionality if they required. Over time we have added more functionality to the main version and demanded more from the project managers, in line with organizational maturity.

PRINCE2 is supported throughout the project platform. A PRINCE2 product structure would be as follows:

- Organizational maturity.
- Individuals' skills and training.
- Building a PMO including setting up portfolio management.
- Tailoring PRINCE2 to suit our university environment by simplifying management products such as project brief, pid, end project document and introduce checklists as a formal checkout point between stages.
- Introduce our new project platform based on Microsoft 365, Teams, Planner, and a digital project management system built in Sharepoint.

## 5. Digital project management at UiB

The core elements of our digital project management platform are Microsoft 365 and a tailored Sharepoint-application from a Norwegian vendor, Puzzlepart.

PRINCE2 is fully integrated within our digital project management platform, which makes it possible to run a PRINCE2 project from initiation to delivery. Programme and portfolio management is built in and gives us the possibility to have a more holistic view of all of our projects.

As our new digital project management platform and project portal is based on SharePoint, this means all files are available in one location, which allows us to avoid duplication. The use of Teams and Planner to both collaborate and build project teams gives us an extra dimension to the digital project work.

To use a software implementation project as an example, we carried out the process of assessing alternatives and writing a project brief entirely through Teams. This was done over a period of just eight days from start to finish, without holding a single physical meeting in the group. All activity happened in Teams, with real-time co-authoring and active use of group or person-tagging when input was needed.

When projects are created in the project portal, a Microsoft Teams channel is created at the same time. The project manager has the possibility to set up further channels to enhance effective communication to all stakeholders in the project.

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## 6. Challenges

As described at the start, we had to acknowledge that we faced a huge challenge on how we undertook and completed projects, and our ability to deliver according to expectations and desired benefits.

This has been an innovation-led project which required the organization and individuals to mature and understand how to transform and to be able to change behaviour in a digital project world.

So how did we overcome these challenges?

In PRINCE2, we speak about reasons and business options. The only business option was to change. There were no quick fixes, no workarounds, and no turning back. So, we changed bit by bit, step by step, discussion by discussion, maturing, learning, gaining knowledge, enhancing our skills. It takes time and effort to change how we work as individuals and as an organization. But we did it and will continue to do so.

## 7. Successes

Our story tells us that this has been a successful transformation.

- The Digital Project Management solution has been released and projects have now started to use the solution.
- We have tailored PRINCE2 to suit our university culture and organization by improving how we do PRINCE2 projects.

With any project, it is important to ask 'why', 'who', 'what', 'what if'. It is even more imperative in a digital project management environment. We have a new set of project documents such as the project brief, PID, and end project report based on asking these questions. These are now only initial documents and all changes to documents are maintained within the project portal.

Now we can maximize the potential of delivering a tailored and fully digitalized project based on PRINCE2, and the Norwegian government adoption of PRINCE2 called Prosjektveiviseren ([prosjektveiviseren.no](http://prosjektveiviseren.no)).

When Covid-19 hit, it triggered a digital change almost overnight, which required a shift towards digital project management. Throughout the pandemic, we have been forced to take a more pragmatic approach to our digital project management. One example is how we created and developed a project brief in Microsoft Teams in just a few hours.

Working in Microsoft Teams provides the possibility of having a project board, project owner, project manager, and project team (including necessary stakeholders) comment and discuss the development of a project brief. Decision lines are shorter when everyone is available. In many ways, this is an agile way of working. We may be heading toward being an agile organization.

## 8. Conclusion

Be patient, mature slowly, get people involved, ability to learn and explore. Have fun on the road to success.

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## 9. About the authors



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30 years of experience in project management. PRINCE2 trainer, coach, and reviewer of the 6th edition of Managing Successful Project with PRINCE2



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These methods include ITIL<sup>®</sup>, the most widely accepted approach to IT service management in the world and AXELOS<sup>®</sup> ProPath, encompassing PRINCE2<sup>®</sup> and MSP<sup>®</sup>. They are adopted by private, public and voluntary sectors in more than 150 countries to improve employees' skills, knowledge and competence in order to make both individuals and organizations work more effectively.

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