

Life cycles and delivery approaches

Four key rules for life cycles and delivery approaches, each with a worked example, then the two model sheets. They serve IPMA, PMI and APM exams alike.

KEY RULES

The gate decision

Look back (did the phase deliver?) + look forward (does the business case still hold?) → go on · go on with changes · stop

The sponsor or board decides; the project manager brings the evidence. The more uncertain the work, the shorter the phases, so the gates come sooner.

Example: An uncertain 12-month project in 4 phases of 3 months reaches its first gate after 3 months; in 2 phases of 6 months, only after 6

Predictive or iterative: two questions

Clear requirements + costly late change → predictive · unclear + cheap → iterative · unclear + costly → explore, then build once · clear + cheap → free choice

Ask it of each part of the work. When the parts give different answers, the project is a hybrid: a predictive frame with iterative work inside.

Example: A payment link with fixed rules that takes 6 weeks to recertify after any change: predictive. Resident screens that can be changed in 1 day: iterative

Timebox capacity: fixed time, flexible scope

timeboxes = weeks for building ÷ timebox length · capacity = timeboxes × points per timebox

When the date and the budget are fixed, scope is what flexes. Story points are the team's own size units for pieces of work; its pace is the points it finished per timebox recently.

Example: 20 weeks to launch, 4 kept for testing: $16 \div 2 = 8$ two-week timeboxes. The team finishes about 15 points per timebox: $8 \times 15 = 120$. The wanted work is 150 points, so 30 (20%) wait until after launch

Tailor, then review

Add what the project needs · change what does not fit · drop what only costs effort · review at each gate

Keep the tailored approach in line with governance, such as reporting and change control, and explain every change to the approach.

Example: A 6-person team on a 4-month internal project swaps a 20-page monthly report for a 1-page summary every 2 weeks, agreed with the sponsor

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Sources: IPMA ICB4 (2015); PMI, PMBOK® Guide, 8th ed.; PMI, PMP® Examination Content Outline (2026); APM Body of Knowledge, 8th ed.; APM, PMQ handbook (v6, 2026); IPMA International Certification Regulations (ICR) v4.4 (2025)

Key: IPMA = International Project Management Association; ICB4 = IPMA's Individual Competence Baseline; PMI = Project Management Institute; PMBOK® Guide = PMI's body-of-knowledge guide; PMP® = PMI's Project Management Professional; APM = Association for Project Management; PMQ = APM's Project Management Qualification; ICR = IPMA's International Certification Regulations. Unofficial study material for IPMA®, PMI® and APM exams. Not affiliated with, endorsed by or approved by IPMA, PMI or APM, and not an accredited or endorsed training provider. IPMA® and IPMA ICB® are registered trademarks of IPMA in Switzerland and other countries. PMI, PMP, CAPM and PMBOK are registered marks of Project Management Institute, Inc. APM is a trade mark of the Association for Project Management. Other marks belong to their owners. PMP® exam facts are from PMI's public PMP® Examination Content Outline (2026); check the current version on [pmi.org](https://www.pmi.org). APM's qualifications are its own; this series is not an APM Accredited Provider or APM Endorsed. Examples use a fictional city and its projects.



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Life cycles, phases and gates

Compare the main life cycles: their shape, their gates, and when each one fits.

	PREDICTIVE (LINEAR)	ITERATIVE (AGILE)	HYBRID
Shape	One pass through the phases	Repeated short timeboxes	A mix, by phase or by part
Gates	After each phase	In step with the timeboxes	Main gates, reviews between
Value	At the end	Early and often	In planned releases
Change	Formal change control	Reorder the backlog	Flexible inside a fixed frame
Fits	Clear work, costly to change	Unclear work, cheap to change	Mixed work: most projects

The series' own comparison, drawing on the PMBOK® Guide 8 (PMI's body-of-knowledge guide) (Standard §4) and APM (Association for Project Management) BoK 8 (APM's Body of Knowledge) (§2.5, §3.5.3). Names and phases vary in practice.

WHAT IT IS

A **life cycle** is the chain of phases from the first idea to the close. At each **gate**, the sponsor or board looks back at what was delivered and forward at the business case, then goes on, changes course or stops. A predictive life cycle runs the phases once; an iterative one repeats short timeboxes; a hybrid mixes the two. APM's extended life cycle adds two phases after handover: adoption and benefits.

HOW IT WORKS

- 01
- Name the phases and what each must deliver before its gate.
- 02
- Agree who decides at each gate, and on what evidence.
- 03
- Fit phase length to uncertainty: more unknowns, shorter phases.
- 04
- Iterative work: review every timebox; keep gates for big decisions.

MID-LEVEL · WORKED EXAMPLE

Apply it well

The situation: A city team has eight months to move resident parking permits online, with a fixed-price supplier and a go-live before most residents renew in January.

The project manager sets a predictive frame: initiation (month 1), requirements and design (month 2), build (months 3 to 5), then migration, tests and training (months 6 to 8), with a gate after each. The resident screens are built in two-week timeboxes.

In the exam: Name your phases and gates, what each gate checked and who decided. Say where you iterated inside the frame, and why.

SENIOR · WORKED EXAMPLE

Design and lead it

The situation: A city is joining 14 online services under one login over 30 months, with funding in tranches and a national electronic ID (e-ID) login that changes only in fixed release windows.

The project manager designs a 6-month foundation phase, then three delivery phases, each adding services. The board decides at each gate (months 6, 15 and 24, then closure at 30) and releases funds there. Teams iterate inside each phase; the e-ID windows stay fixed.

In the exam: Explain the life cycle you designed for others: why these phases, what each gate tests, who decides, and how funding follows the gates.

WHERE IT SITS

IPMA · ICB4	PMI · PMBOK® GUIDE 8 · PMP® EXAM	APM · BOK 8 · PMQ EXAM
Stages fit the approach: 4.5.4.3; phase transitions: 4.5.10.2; waterfall or iterative: 4.5.1.5	Standard §4.1–4.2, pp. 57–67; phases, gates, approaches. Exam outline: Process task 1	BoK §2.5 life cycles (incl. extended); decision gates §3.5.3. PMQ (APM's Project Management Qualification) objective 1

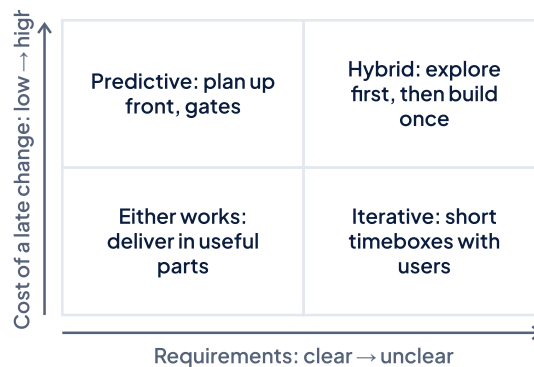
Sources: IPMA ICB4 (2015); PMI, PMBOK® Guide, 8th ed.; PMI, PMP® Examination Content Outline (2026); APM Body of Knowledge, 8th ed.; APM, PMQ handbook (v6, 2026)

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Choosing the delivery approach

Decide, part by part, how much to plan up front and how much to learn as you go.



Our own matrix, drawing on factors in the PMBOK® Guide 8 (PMI's body-of-knowledge guide) (Standard §4.3) and APM (Association for Project Management) BoK 8 (APM's Body of Knowledge) (§2.5). Ask it of each part of the work.

WHAT IT IS

Two questions sort most work: how clear are the requirements, and how costly is a late change? Clear and costly points to **predictive**; unclear and cheap to **iterative** (agile); unclear and costly: explore, then build once. Mixed parts give a **hybrid**. The matrix is our own; its factors come from the PMBOK® Guide 8 and the APM Body of Knowledge 8.

HOW IT WORKS

- 01 Rank the success criteria: a fixed date means scope flexes.
- 02 Place each part of the work on the two questions.
- 03 Check the users, the contract, the team and the culture.
- 04 Tailor governance and reporting; review at each gate.

MID-LEVEL · WORKED EXAMPLE

Apply it well

The situation: A city team has eight months to move resident parking permits online, with a supplier on a fixed price.

The date ranks first: go-live before most residents renew in January. Clear rules and a fixed-price contract make late change costly: a predictive frame. The screens are uncertain and cheap to change, so they are built in two-week timeboxes: a hybrid.

In the exam: Name the facts behind the choice, what stays fixed, what may flex, and when you will review it.

SENIOR · WORKED EXAMPLE

Design and lead it

The situation: A city is joining 14 online services under one login over 30 months, with a platform supplier.

The project manager sets a hybrid for others: phase gates and the national e-ID login's release dates stay fixed, teams iterate inside each phase, and the platform contract matches: a fixed price for the core, time and materials for changes.

In the exam: Show the system: how contracts, governance and teams fit the approach, its effect on the wider organisation, and who may change it as the context moves.

WHERE IT SITS

IPMA · ICB4	PMI · PMBOK® GUIDE 8 · PMP® EXAM	APM · BOK 8 · PMQ EXAM
4.5.1.4: choose, defend and review the approach; complexity: 4.5.1.3; waterfall or iterative: 4.5.1.5	Standard §4.3, pp. 67–69: factors; Guide §3: tailoring. Exam outline: Process task 1	BoK §2.5 life cycles; §2.5.3 hybrids and governance. PMQ (APM's Project Management Qualification) objectives 1c and 17a (minimum viable product)

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