

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)

Key: IPMA = International Project Management Association; ICB4 = IPMA's Individual Competence Baseline (4.5.4 etc.: its competence elements); PMI = Project Management Institute; PMP® = PMI's Project Management Professional. 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. 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. Levels (this series' labels): Mid-level = moderately complex projects (IPMA Level C, PMI's PMP®); Senior = complex projects and people (IPMA Level B, APM's Chartered Project Professional).