

Project Management, One Panel at a Time

12 approaches. One team. A project that matters.



PLAN WITH PURPOSE. DELIVER TOGETHER.

A plain-language guide for new and experienced project managers, team members, sponsors and students.

Prepared for Bertie Kangoya | October 2026

Meet the team

A fictional story with lessons you can use at work.



Maya leads the project and connects people.

Leo represents the delivery team.

Asha brings the users' perspective.

Sam sponsors the work and authorizes major decisions.

THEIR MISSION

Open a community learning centre with a safe room, working computers, trained volunteers and a simple booking service. The examples and numbers in this book are fictional.

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

Read the dialogue first. Then use the short explanation and the TRY IT activity. The team explores alternative ways of doing the work; it does not need to use all 12 approaches at once.

A USEFUL DISTINCTION

The attached poster groups 12 related ideas. They are not 12 equivalent, competing systems. Agile is an umbrella of values and principles; Scrum is a framework; CPM and Critical Chain are scheduling techniques. Lean and Six Sigma improve processes. Several approaches can work together.

Find your way

Start and plan: 3-4 | The 12 approaches: 5-16

Deliver and close: 17-19 | Choose an approach: 20

Reusable tools: 21-23 | Glossary: 24 | Sources: 25-26

First, agree the purpose

A project creates a particular result within a defined period.



SAM

Can we open the centre in twelve weeks?

MAYA

First, what must people be able to do when it opens?

START WITH THE NEED

Talk to users, the sponsor and the people who will run the service. Agree the problem, expected benefit and a measurable definition of success.

WRITE A SHORT PROJECT CHARTER

Record the purpose, scope, exclusions, target dates, budget limit, key risks and decision owner. Confirm who can authorize the project and major changes.

MAKE SUCCESS TESTABLE

Example: 10 working computers, accessible facilities checked by qualified people, trained volunteers and a booking service tested with users. The service owner will track attendance after opening.

TRY IT

Write one sentence: "This project helps [people] achieve [result] by [date]."

Turn the idea into work

Plan enough to act, then update the plan as you learn.



LEO

“Open the centre” is too big to estimate.

MAYA

Let us split it into results, then tasks, owners and dependencies.

BREAK IT DOWN

List the deliverables: room, equipment, booking service and volunteer training. Break each into manageable work. Agree what evidence will show it is accepted.

BUILD A REALISTIC FORECAST

Ask the people doing the work for estimates and availability. Link tasks that depend on each other. Include supplier lead times, approvals, costs and an explicit allowance for uncertainty.

SET THE WORKING AGREEMENTS

Name owners and decision makers. Agree where work is tracked, when users review it and how problems are escalated. Keep an approved baseline where needed and compare it with the latest forecast.

TRY IT

Choose one deliverable. Add its owner, acceptance test, estimate and predecessor.

Traditional / Predictive

Plan the known work and control changes.



SAM

Can we agree the room scope and spending limit first?

MAYA

Yes. We will baseline the plan and assess proposed changes.

WHAT IT MEANS

Predictive management defines much of the scope early and plans how to deliver it. A baseline is an approved reference for scope, schedule or cost. It can change through agreed control.

GOOD FIT

Requirements are reasonably stable; commitments and dependencies need early coordination.

WATCH OUT

Do not treat an old plan as more reliable than new evidence. “Fixed” does not mean changes are forbidden.

HOW THE TEAM USES IT

Define scope and acceptance; estimate and sequence work; approve the baseline; track actuals and forecasts; assess and authorize changes.

TRY IT

Name one stable requirement and one assumption that could change.

Read more: [1]

Waterfall

Move through defined phases in sequence.



LEO

We need the room design before installation.

ASHA

Then let us review the design before anyone builds it.

WHAT IT MEANS

Waterfall is a largely sequential life cycle: requirements, design, build, test and handover. Reviews connect the phases. It is often used within a predictive approach, rather than being its opposite.

GOOD FIT

Work has clear handoffs and costly physical dependencies, such as a well-understood installation.

WATCH OUT

Feedback only at the end can reveal expensive mistakes. Review and test assumptions as early as possible.

HOW THE TEAM USES IT

Define phase outputs and exit criteria; review with users; approve the handoff; build and verify. Rework may require revisiting earlier phases.

TRY IT

For one phase, write the evidence needed before the next phase starts.

Read more: [1]

Agile

Deliver useful pieces and learn from feedback.



ASHA

Users want fewer steps in the booking form.

MAYA

Let us test a small improvement before building the rest.

WHAT IT MEANS

Agile emphasizes collaboration, useful delivery, feedback and adaptation. Its roots are in software. Teams can apply these ideas elsewhere when work can be tested and improved in small pieces.

GOOD FIT

Needs are evolving and users can regularly review working results.

WATCH OUT

Agile still needs planning, quality standards, documentation appropriate to the work and financial control.

HOW THE TEAM USES IT

Agree the goal; prioritize valuable work; deliver a small usable result; obtain feedback; reorder the next work. Keep checking the overall outcome.

TRY IT

Find the smallest useful result a user could try this week.

Read more: [2]

Scrum

Use a clear goal and a regular rhythm.



ASHA

For this Sprint, users should be able to reserve a session.

LEO

We will select work we believe we can finish to our quality standard.

WHAT IT MEANS

Scrum organizes work in Sprints of one month or less. The Product Owner orders the Product Backlog; Developers plan and create usable increments; the Scrum Master helps Scrum work effectively.

GOOD FIT

A team can work toward a shared product goal and inspect usable results frequently.

WATCH OUT

A Daily Scrum is for Developers to inspect progress toward the Sprint Goal, not a manager's status round.

HOW THE TEAM USES IT

Plan the Sprint; inspect daily; meet the Definition of Done; review results with stakeholders; hold a retrospective to improve teamwork. Review and retrospective have different purposes.

TRY IT

Write a Sprint Goal and two checks for your Definition of Done.

Read more: [3]

Kanban

Make work visible and finish before starting more.



LEO

Testing is full. Shall I start another item?

MAYA

Help finish or unblock existing work first. Our limit is a signal.

WHAT IT MEANS

Kanban improves the flow of work. Make workflow rules explicit, control work in progress (WIP), and pull new work when capacity exists. A board alone is not enough.

GOOD FIT

Requests arrive continuously, priorities shift, or a team needs to expose queues and bottlenecks.

WATCH OUT

Moving cards does not prove value. Agree what “finished” means and avoid hiding blocked work.

HOW THE TEAM USES IT

Map the workflow; agree WIP limits; watch blocked and ageing items; inspect cycle time and throughput; improve the flow. Example: cap items being tested at two.

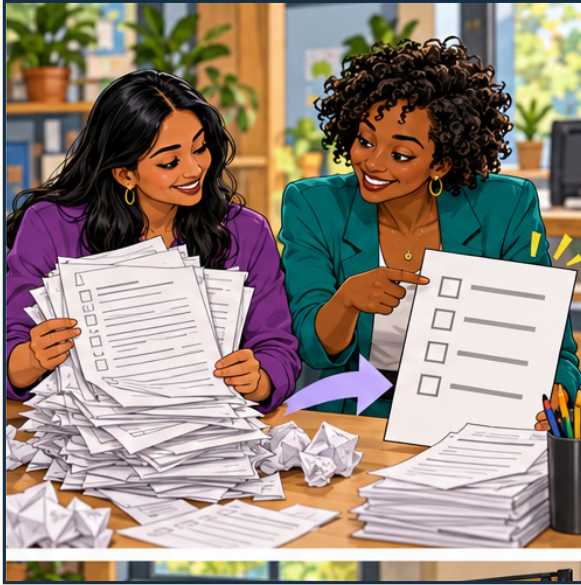
TRY IT

Choose a WIP limit for one stage and agree what to do when it is reached.

Read more: [4]

Lean

Remove waste while protecting value and people.



ASHA

Users write the same details on three forms.

MAYA

Let us remove duplication and keep the checks that matter.

WHAT IT MEANS

Lean starts with value as experienced by the customer or user. Follow work from request to result, reduce waste, improve flow, respond to demand and keep learning with the people doing the work.

GOOD FIT

Waiting, handoffs, rework or unnecessary steps consume time without improving the result.

WATCH OUT

Cutting staff or removing essential safeguards is not the same as removing waste.

HOW THE TEAM USES IT

Observe the real process; map its steps and waits; identify waste; test one improvement; measure the effect. Keep necessary quality, safety and privacy controls.

TRY IT

Ask: “Which step makes users wait, and why does that step exist?”

Read more: [5]

Six Sigma

Use evidence to reduce errors and variation.



ASHA

Some bookings keep getting duplicated.

LEO

Let us measure the problem before choosing a fix.

WHAT IT MEANS

Six Sigma is a data-based improvement approach. For an existing process, DMAIC means Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve and Control. It investigates causes rather than relying on guesses.

GOOD FIT

A repeatable process has measurable defects or inconsistent results and enough trustworthy data.

WATCH OUT

A few good results do not prove a stable improvement. Check data quality and monitor the process over time.

HOW THE TEAM USES IT

Define duplicate bookings; measure a baseline; analyze causes; test a fix; maintain controls. Example: 12 duplicates in 100 bookings is 12%; compare like-for-like after the change.

TRY IT

Define one defect so that two people would count it in the same way.

Read more: [6]

Hybrid

Use different approaches where they fit.



LEO

The room needs planned inspections.

ASHA

The booking service needs frequent user feedback. We can do both.

WHAT IT MEANS

Hybrid combines predictive and adaptive practices deliberately. In this story, room work follows an agreed plan while booking features evolve through short feedback cycles.

GOOD FIT

Parts of the project are stable but other parts are uncertain or benefit from incremental delivery.

WATCH OUT

Different teams can use conflicting dates or definitions of done. Make their interfaces and decisions explicit.

HOW THE TEAM USES IT

Choose the approach for each workstream; align milestones and dependencies; agree shared acceptance and reporting; review how the pieces integrate.

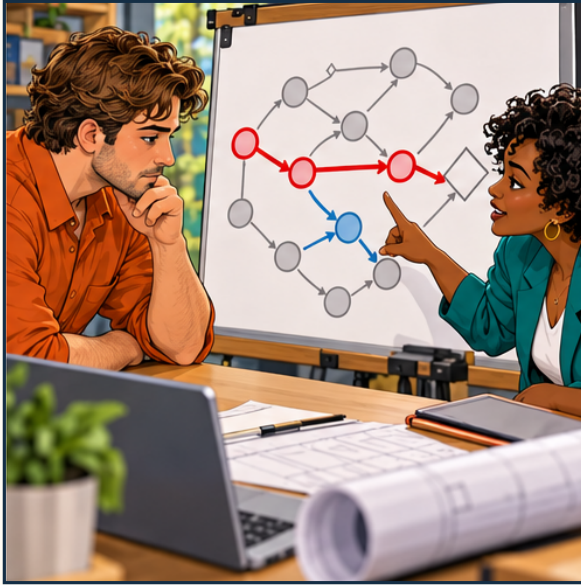
TRY IT

Split your project into two workstreams. Explain which approach suits each and why.

Read more: [7]

Critical Path Method

Find the dependency chain that drives the finish.



LEO

Buying computers will take the longest, right?

MAYA

Check the complete paths. The longest individual task is not the answer.

WHAT IT MEANS

CPM uses task durations and dependencies to calculate schedule dates and float. In a simple unconstrained network, the longest-duration path determines the earliest project finish.

GOOD FIT

Activities and dependencies can be estimated and the finish date needs careful coordination.

WATCH OUT

There may be several critical paths. Delays, changed estimates or constraints can change which path is critical.

HOW THE TEAM USES IT

Example: after design (2 days), room work takes 5 days while purchasing takes 3. Setup (1) waits for both. Paths are $2+5+1=8$ and $2+3+1=6$ days. Room work is critical; purchasing has 2 days of float in this simplified case.

TRY IT

Draw two dependency paths, add their durations and identify the longer one.

Read more: [8]

Critical Chain

Account for scarce people and protect the finish.



LEO

Both tasks need me at the same time.

MAYA

Then our plan must respect your availability and protect the final date.

WHAT IT MEANS

Critical Chain considers dependencies and resource constraints together. It protects delivery with strategically placed time buffers and manages their consumption as work progresses.

GOOD FIT

Shared specialists, equipment shortages or multitasking make a dependency-only schedule unrealistic.

WATCH OUT

A buffer is not a reason to hide delays. Avoid arbitrary padding of every task and constant task switching.

HOW THE TEAM USES IT

Resolve resource conflicts; identify the resource-constrained chain; add a project buffer and suitable feeding buffers; focus execution; monitor buffer use and respond early.

TRY IT

Find one person booked on overlapping tasks and agree the priority.

Read more: [9]

PRINCE2

Keep decisions, responsibilities and value clear.



SAM

Does the next stage still justify the investment?

MAYA

Here are the benefits, forecast, risks and decision we need from the board.

WHAT IT MEANS

PRINCE2 is a tailorable project management method with defined responsibilities, management stages and continued business justification. It can support different delivery approaches.

GOOD FIT

A project needs clear oversight, delegated authority, stage decisions and a shared business case.

WATCH OUT

Governance should help decisions. Copying every possible document can bury a small project in paperwork.

HOW THE TEAM USES IT

Agree the business case and roles; plan stages and products; set tolerances for delegated control; monitor progress; escalate forecast breaches; seek stage authorization and close formally.

TRY IT

Name who may approve a major scope change and when escalation is required.

Read more: [10]

Extreme PM / XPM

Learn safely when the path is highly uncertain.



ASHA

Would portable learning kits reach more people?

SAM

Test that idea within an agreed time and cost limit before we scale it.

WHAT IT MEANS

Extreme Project Management emphasizes flexible leadership and learning under rapid change and high uncertainty. The label is less standardized than Scrum; practices vary by author and organization.

GOOD FIT

Innovation work has unclear solutions and major assumptions need early investigation.

WATCH OUT

Uncertainty does not remove accountability. Experiments need limits, evidence and a decision about what follows.

HOW THE TEAM USES IT

Agree the intended value; choose the biggest unknown; run a bounded experiment; review evidence with stakeholders; continue, change direction or stop. This is a practical example, not a universal XPM process.

TRY IT

Write: “We believe __. We will test __. We will stop or change if __.”

Read more: [11]

When the plan meets reality

Show the impact, offer options and ask for a decision.



LEO

The equipment delivery is now three days late.

MAYA

Log the issue, check its impact and compare our recovery options.

RISK OR ISSUE?

A risk is an uncertain event that could affect the project, positively or negatively. An issue is happening now. Give each important item an owner, response and review date.

CHOOSE A RESPONSE

Confirm the supplier date. Check dependencies, available float and resources. Compare partial delivery, a temporary substitute or resequencing. Explain cost, quality and timing effects before deciding.

CONTROL CHANGES AND COMMUNICATE

Record the request and its impact. Get approval from the right authority before committing. Update the plan, forecast and affected people. Report completed results, next work, risks and decisions needed.

TRY IT

Write a status message with one fact, one impact, two options and a decision deadline.

“Done” needs evidence

Users should help define success before the final review.



LEO

The booking screen looks finished.

ASHA

Can users complete a booking, correct a mistake and use it accessibly?

AGREE ACCEPTANCE EARLY

For each deliverable, name the acceptance criteria and who will accept it. Make criteria observable: a booking is saved once, a confirmation appears and a user can cancel it.

BUILD QUALITY INTO DELIVERY

Review designs, check work as it is produced and test realistic cases. Involve relevant specialists and users. Record defects with an owner and retest fixes. Do not postpone all checking until handover.

KEEP TWO IDEAS DISTINCT

Acceptance criteria describe what a particular deliverable must do. In Scrum, the Definition of Done is the shared quality standard for an increment. A demonstration alone is not proof of readiness.

TRY IT

Replace “works well” with a test someone else can repeat and observe.

Handover is part of delivery

The project ends; ownership of the service continues.



SAM

We have opened! Is the project complete?

MAYA

Once acceptance, support, ownership and the remaining actions are agreed.

MAKE THE HANDOVER USABLE

Obtain acceptance. Transfer instructions, access, training, support contacts and relevant records. Assign unresolved items to named owners with dates and agreed consequences.

CLOSE THE PROJECT

Confirm final costs and supplier obligations. Archive decisions and useful evidence. Release resources. Discuss what helped, what hurt and one improvement to carry into the next project.

CHECK THE BENEFIT AFTER LAUNCH

Opening the room is an output. People gaining useful skills is an outcome. The service owner measures attendance and learning outcomes after launch and decides what further improvement is needed.

TRY IT

Name a benefits owner, a measure and a review date after the project closes.

Which approach fits?

Start with the work, the uncertainty and the decisions needed.

If your main situation is...	Consider...
Stable requirements and early commitments	Predictive planning; Waterfall where phased handoffs fit.
Evolving needs and regular user feedback	Agile; Scrum when a product team can work toward Sprint Goals.
Continuous requests and blocked queues	Kanban to manage flow and work in progress.
Too much waiting or duplication	Lean to improve the end-to-end process.
Repeated defects or inconsistent results	Six Sigma for structured, data-based improvement.
Stable physical work plus evolving features	Hybrid, with shared milestones and acceptance.
Finish date depends on task sequences	CPM; add Critical Chain thinking where resource constraints dominate.
Clear authority and investment oversight needed	PRINCE2, tailored to the project and delivery approach.
Unknown solution and high uncertainty	Bounded experiments; XPM can inform the approach.

These choices overlap. A project can use PRINCE2 governance, hybrid delivery and a critical-path schedule. Agree one coherent way of working and review whether it helps.

Your one-page project brief

Use this at kickoff. Keep it short enough to discuss together.

PURPOSE & BENEFIT

Who needs this, and what will improve?

SCOPE & EXCLUSIONS

What will we deliver? What is outside this project?

SUCCESS & ACCEPTANCE

What evidence proves success? Who accepts it?

PEOPLE & AUTHORITY

Sponsor, delivery lead, users, owners and approvers.

DATES, COST & CAPACITY

Target milestones, budget limit and available people.

APPROACH & UNCERTAINTY

How will we deliver? Top assumptions, risks and dependencies.

Confirm approval and date: _____

Make work and status visible

Use one shared source of truth; choose a useful review rhythm.

A SMALL DELIVERY PLAN

Break work into manageable items. For each, record the owner, estimate, dependency, acceptance evidence and current forecast. “Done” must be verifiable.

Work item	Owner / depends on	Evidence of done
Room ready	Leo / approved design	Required inspections and acceptance recorded
Booking pilot	Asha / user needs	User tests passed; defects addressed
Volunteer training	Maya / usable service	Volunteers demonstrate key tasks

A CONCISE STATUS UPDATE

As of [date]: overall status and reason. Completed: accepted results. Next: planned results and dates. Forecast: latest finish and total cost versus approved baseline. Risks/issues: owner and action. Decisions: who must decide what, by when.

REPORT FORECAST, NOT JUST SPENDING

Example: approved budget 20,000 units; actual spend 8,000; estimated remaining cost 13,000. Forecast total = 21,000: 1,000 above baseline. Explain the cause and options. These are illustrative figures, not the centre's budget.

TRY IT

Send a status update that makes one decision easier, not just a task list longer.

Risks, issues and changes

Make ownership and next actions explicit.

Record	Minimum useful information
Risk	Cause; uncertain event; effect; likelihood; impact; response; owner; review date.
Issue	What happened; current impact; action; owner; due date; escalation needed.
Change request	Requested change; reason; options; scope/date/cost/quality impact; decision owner; decision and date.
Decision log	Decision; rationale; decision maker; date; affected items and people.

EXAMPLE: PREPARE BEFORE THE PROBLEM

Risk: if the supplier misses the delivery date, setup may slip. Leo checks the lead time weekly and confirms an alternative. Escalation trigger: delivery forecast moves beyond the available schedule float.

EXAMPLE: ASSESS A REQUEST

Request: add five more computers. Check funding, space, power, network capacity, lead time and training. Present options and impacts to the authorized approver; record the decision and update affected plans.

TRY IT

Pick your biggest risk. Add an owner, a response and a clear escalation trigger.

Speak the same language

Use these definitions to check shared understanding.

Term	Meaning
Acceptance criteria	Observable conditions a deliverable must meet.
Backlog	An ordered list of work or needs awaiting attention.
Baseline	An approved reference used to compare performance.
Benefit	An improvement or value resulting from the work.
Buffer	A planned allowance that protects a schedule.
Deliverable	A result, product or service the project produces.
Dependency	A relationship that affects the order of work.
Float	Time an activity can move without delaying the relevant schedule milestone, under stated assumptions.
Governance	How authority, oversight and decisions are organized.
Increment	A usable addition to the product; in Scrum it meets the Definition of Done.
Milestone	A significant point or event in the schedule.
Scope	The agreed boundaries of the work and results.
Stakeholder	Someone who affects or is affected by the project.
Tolerance	An agreed boundary of delegated control before escalation.
WIP	Work in progress: started but not yet finished.

Where the ideas come from

Read the original guides for fuller definitions and practice.

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[5] LEAN

Lean Enterprise Institute (n.d.). Lean Thinking and Practice.

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Further reading and credits

Keep learning, then tailor the method to your context.

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DeCarlo, D. (2004). eXtreme Project Management: Using Leadership, Principles, and Tools to Deliver Value in the Face of Volatility. Jossey-Bass. Publisher listing:

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INSPIRATION AND PRODUCTION

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