

Guide to Integrated Assurance Management



Because when projects
succeed, society benefits

Association for Project Management
Ibis House, Regent Park
Summerleys Road, Princes Risborough
Buckinghamshire
HP27 9LE

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Preface

This guide is founded on the premise that integrated assurance management matters a great deal to organisations making investments that are delivered using project, programme or portfolio management. In response, this guide attempts to capture best practices for the design, implementation and operation of assurance management.

The guide builds upon the valuable contribution of the Association for Project Management's previous research and guidance on assurance management, and upon contributions from other professional associations, including Axelos/PeopleCert, Project Management Institute and the Institute of Internal Auditors, to name just a few.

This guide is intended to support assurance management of public-sector, private-sector and third-sector (such as not-for-profit) portfolios, programmes and projects, regardless of geography and the nature of the focus (for example, infrastructure and built environment, complex product development, business transformation, international development, sustainability or technology modernisation).

The guide is relevant both to the individuals who are accountable for portfolio, programme and project success (for example, sponsors), and to those providing support to them (for example, individuals working in portfolio offices, programme management offices, project offices and internal audit).

I hope you find the guide to be relevant and of practical use for your organisation as you design, implement or operate assurance management for your portfolio, programme or project.

Dr Andrew Schuster

About this guide

The premise of the guide is that assurance management should work in an integrated way to support the governance structure for a portfolio, programme or project. Integrated assurance management is co-ordinated across organisational, functional and scope boundaries, and over time, so that it optimises delivery and justifies the investment.

Three fictitious scenarios are used throughout the guide to illustrate aspects of integrated assurance management. A short summary of each scenario is provided below. The first scenario is for a complex public-sector policy implementation programme. The second scenario is for a private-sector programme with a complex supply chain. The third scenario is for a not-for-profit organisation with a mission-critical programme for the organisation.



Scenario 1: A public-sector department is implementing an IT-related policy that has been approved by government. Implementation of the policy requires the involvement of other departments.

The primary (hosting) department has appointed a senior civil servant to sponsor the policy implementation programme. Policy managers with project management experience have been appointed to lead workstreams related to technology modernisation, regulation changes and stakeholder engagement. There is a documented governance structure with many individual roles in the structure, including members of other departments. However, the division of assurance management accountabilities is not clearly defined for each department.

There is an internal audit team for each department and a central government agency providing oversight of all major IT projects. There are many affected stakeholders invited to participate in various committees. Project teams rely on the affected stakeholders to raise issues and assure them that the programme is delivering well and will meet expectations. However, in effect, the individual stakeholders have limited accountability and no authority within the governance structure.

The risk management processes did not fully assess the risk associated with the operationalisation of the technology modernisation activities. Citizens affected by the policy are beginning to complain to government, and the minister is asking questions, and the answers being provided are not satisfactory.



Scenario 2: Two aerospace organisations are collaborating and funding the delivery of a complex product development programme.

Both organisations have appointed a senior executive to be a member of the sponsoring group for the initiative. However, it was agreed that the largest funder would chair the sponsoring group meetings. There is a programme manager with delegated authority from the sponsoring group with accountability for the series of projects.

There is a documented governance structure for each of the funding organisations, but not a combined view. There is an extended supply chain beyond the two funding organisations. Reporting occurs regularly, with a heavy focus on schedule and task completion. Implications on costs and risks to delivery are less clear.

Each of the funding organisations has an internal audit team and risk management teams, responsible for co-ordinating that organisation's corporate risk management processes. There have been a few financial reviews by the two organisations' audit teams, but only of the financial aspects related to their own scope of work. Quality management teams are embedded into the delivery project teams, focusing on testing technical components prior to integration and implementation.

Previous programme reports have not escalated risks or issues to the sponsoring group. However, there are indications of schedule delays, escalating costs and emerging risks. For example, the programme manager has recently become aware that a sub-contractor supporting one of the projects is upgrading features that were apparently previously delivered, and that key resources are no longer working on that same project.



Scenario 3: A not-for-profit organisation has initiated a campaign to develop more sustainable funding for itself.

Government funding for the organisation is dwindling, and the organisation needs to develop its donor base. It has appointed its marketing director to head the campaign.

The director is putting in place a programme management structure and controls to deliver the campaign. All members of the executive will have a role to play in addition to their other designated jobs. Reporting is being put in place, with a heavy focus on benefit realisation, such as sustainable funding. Resources management is critical, as the organisation relies heavily on volunteers to get things done.

This programme is critical to the organisation's survival. The director is clear that they need confidence that the programme will deliver as needed. They are looking to define an assurance approach supported by various assurance activities to provide the needed confidence. Because the organisation is small, teams will work together using a peer review approach to deliver assurance management activity.

Chapter 3

Integrated assurance management principles

This chapter identifies principles for integrated assurance management. Principles, by their nature, are:

- universal: they apply broadly, regardless of context (for example, type of portfolio, programme or project)
- self-validating: they have practical use
- empowering: they enable practitioners to reinforce the most critical factors for success.

The premise of this chapter is that well-designed, well-implemented and well-operated integrated assurance management will contribute to a well-designed, well-implemented and well-operated portfolio, programme or project. As such, the principles of good programme and project delivery are the starting point for the principles of good integrated assurance management.

Table 1 illustrates how integrated assurance management supports the seven principles of successful programme management (adapted from Axelos, 2020).

Table 1: How integrated assurance management applies the seven principles of good programme management

| Apply the principle | By, for example ... | Resulting in ... |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| Lead with purpose | Designing the assurance management approach to support leadership decision-making | Increased focus of the leadership on those matters in their sphere of influence and responsibility |
| Collaborate across boundaries | Developing a unified view of assurance management for the portfolio, programme or project | Common adoption of methods, processes, tools and techniques to aid establishing trust, transparency, efficiency and understanding |
| Deal with ambiguity | Adopting a risk-based approach to assurance management that focuses resources on the areas where greater certainty would be valuable | Better identification, analysis and response to risks and emerging change |
| Align with priorities | Prioritising assurance management observations and action plans to reflect risks | The ability to align the priorities of activities within a portfolio, programme or project with business priorities |
| Deploy diverse skills | Allocating the right resources to assurance management activity, balancing independence, specialist knowledge and cost | Cost-effective and efficient provision of the transparency and confidence required by the sponsoring group |
| Realise measurable benefits | Focusing assurance management on risks affecting outcomes or benefits over time | Better information on which to base decisions to secure beneficial outcomes and societal impact |
| Bring pace and value | Planning assurance management so that it is timely, appropriate and responsive | Leaders taking actions earlier to prevent issues that slow delivery and escalate cost |

Chapter 4

Integrated assurance management approach

This chapter defines the approach for co-ordinating assurance management activity across boundaries and over time in support of the governance structure of a portfolio, programme or project.

Definition: The term **integrated assurance management approach** refers to the way all assurance management activity will be co-ordinated.

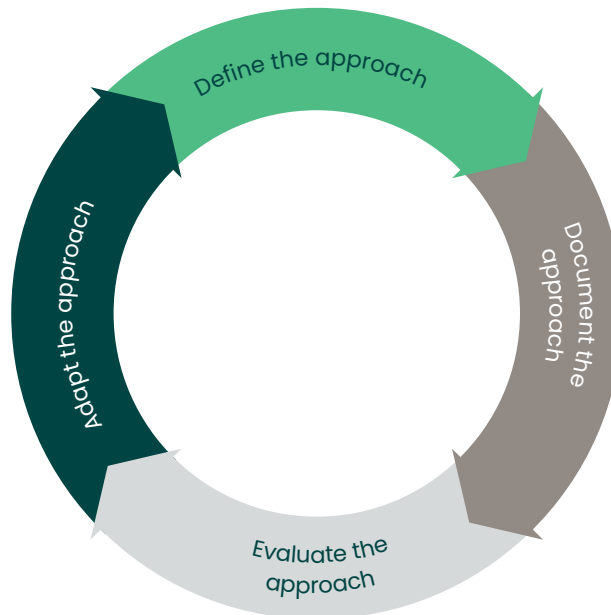


Figure 2: Process for developing and managing the integrated assurance management approach

4.5 Adapt the approach

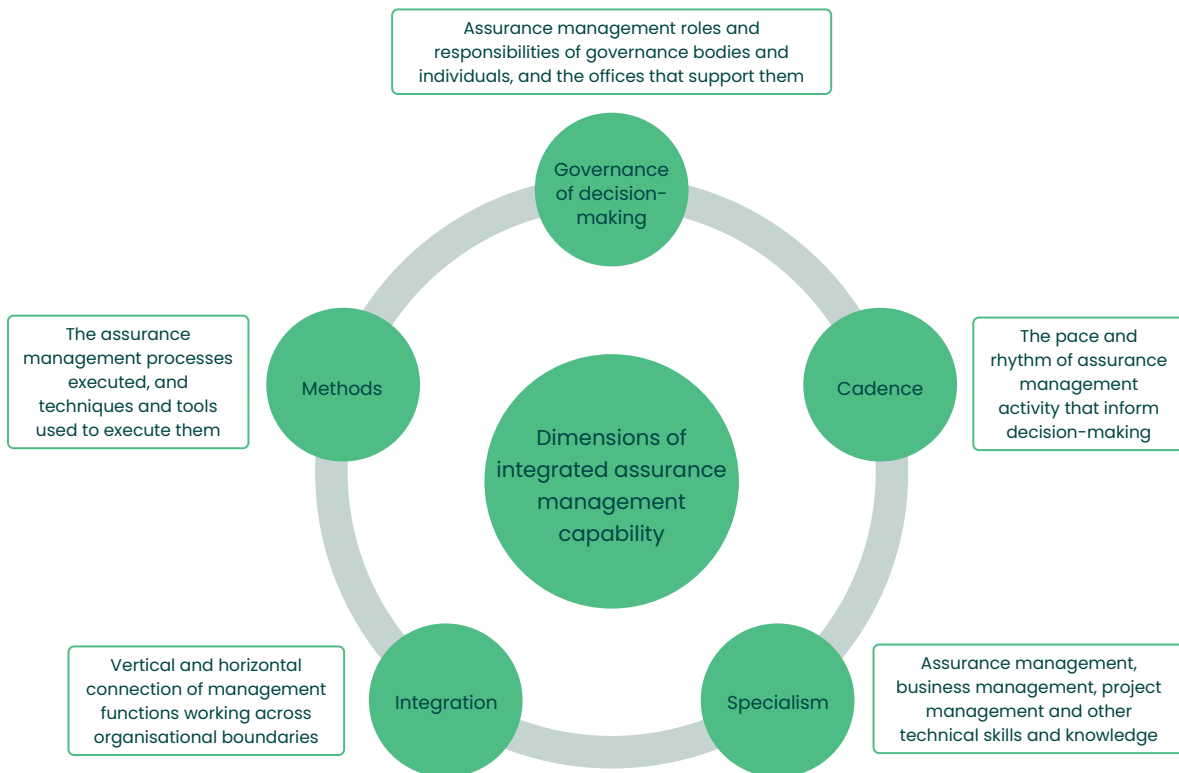
The integrated assurance management approach should be reviewed and updated periodically (for example, quarterly), when significant changes to the scope or risk potential of the programme or project occur, and at key milestones (for example, at key stage gates and between phases of the lifecycle, or as part of a formal scope change management process). The amended approach should be submitted to the sponsor and sponsoring group to be reviewed and validated (along with updates to the portfolio, programme or project delivery plan). The approach should be maintained until the programme or project is closed and delivery responsibility passes to the operational business.

Portfolios, programmes and projects are, by their nature, delivered incrementally, with risks and issues emerging during delivery. As such, the design of the approach to assurance management needs to be adapted as the context evolves, in order to minimise the cost of assurance management and maximise its impact. This guide promotes the adaptation of assurance management by applying the concept of **progressive assurance**.

Definition: The term **progressive assurance** refers to the concept that assurance management activities align to the life cycle of the portfolio, programme or project. It evolves as the needs for assurance evolve and as lessons are identified, learned and implemented over time.

Based on APM research, the integrated assurance management approach is adapted by making adjustments to these five dimensions of capability: decision-making, methods, integration, cadence and specialism. Each of these dimensions can be underdeveloped, excessive or optimised.

4.5 Adapt the approach



Source: Coleman & Schuster (2020)

Figure 4: Five dimensions of integrated assurance management capability

Examples of adaptations:

- **Governance of decision-making:** Providing more or less advice to decision-making governance bodies and individuals.
- **Methods:** Adjustments to the different types of methods applied (see Chapter 5 for details).
- **Integration:** Adjustments to the relationships between assurance management functions and their responsibilities.
- **Cadence:** Adjustments to the pace and rhythm of assurance management activity.
- **Specialism:** Different specialist roles may also be required, for example, for planning, reporting, technical design, quality management, finance, benefit realisation, reporting, procurement, resourcing and communications.

Table 7: Scenario illustration of documentation of integrated assurance management approach

| Scenario illustrations | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Dimension |  Scenario 1 |  Scenario 2 |  Scenario 3 |
| Governance of decision-making | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distributed across three levels together with varying degrees of delegated authority Assurance management for highest-risk areas commissioned by sponsor level | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distributed across three levels together with varying degrees of delegated authority Assurance management for highest-risk areas commissioned by sponsor level | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distributed across three levels together with varying degrees of delegated authority All assurance management commissioned by the marketing director |
| Methods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal government assurance methods required, for example, gateway reviews | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structure methods defined by the organisation used under guidance from the enterprise portfolio management office | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer review |
| Integration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coherence between assurance management functions Coherence between assurance management and risk management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coherence between assurance management functions within and between funding organisations Coherence between assurance management and risk management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Given the size, integration is simpler |
| Specialism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specialists recruited | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specialists recruited | |
| Cadence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scheduled according to major releases, funding milestones, delivery milestones and emergent risks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scheduled according to approval gates, funding milestones, delivery milestones and emergent risks, along with outcome incidental and approved changes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scheduled monthly for specific area of interest |

Chapter 5

Integrated assurance management activity

Integrated assurance management activity should adhere to and support the integrated assurance management approach, acknowledging that multiple assurers may be conducting assurance management activity. This chapter provides details of how individual assurance management activity is planned, resourced, executed, evaluated and adapted.

Individual integrated assurance management activity provide value by:

- identifying and evaluating the delivery challenges facing decision-makers in the governance structure
- providing decision-makers with insight
- advising decision-makers on how to respond to the challenges
- helping to ensure the recommended actions take place in a timely manner
- providing lessons that can be learned and applied to other portfolios, programmes and projects in the organisation.



Figure 5: Process for defining and executing integrated assurance management activity

5.1 Integrated assurance management activity functions

Three main functions work together when assuring portfolio, programme and project delivery, as shown in Table 8. This guide provides direction to individuals in these three functions.

Table 8: Integrated assurance management activity functions

| Function | Description |
|--|--|
| Governance bodies and governance individuals | Those in the governance structure who approve the integrated assurance management plan, commission the portfolio, programme or project assurance, and receive the assurance activity opinion and recommendations |
| Integrated assurance management function | Those who operate with a degree of independence and objectivity, separate from the delivery teams (assurees), undertake assurance management activity on behalf of the governance bodies and individuals, report their findings and insights, and make recommendations |
| Assurees | The teams and individuals who have a role in the planning, design or delivery of the programme or project being assured |

5.1.1 Governance bodies and individuals

Governance bodies and governance individuals are accountable for the successful delivery of a portfolio, programme or project. The sponsor is the most senior governance individual. There are often other individuals with delegated authority from the sponsor; their roles and titles vary depending on the size and complexity of the programme or project. The governance individuals typically have roles in governance bodies, such as in a sponsoring group, programme board or project board.

Appendix 1

Document outlines

A1.1 Outline of integrated assurance management approach

The assurance management approach is a dynamic document, updated at time-driven intervals (for example, quarterly, semi-annually or annually) or in response to events (for example, after a major gate). To adhere to the principles of good assurance management, for example, pace and value, the sponsor of a very large programme may delegate authority to the second line of governance and, in response, the second line of assurance. In this scenario, the second line will assume greater responsibility for the integrated assurance management approach.

| Document | Purpose | High-level content |
|--|---|--|
| Integrated assurance management approach | Defines how assurance will be managed across the programme or project for approval by the sponsor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management case: Summary of the purpose, outcomes and benefits of the portfolio, programme or project, and the risk exposure (for example, risk potential assessment), along with directions to where more details can be found • Governance structure and funding organisation requirements: The requirements for assurance management flowing from the corporate governance of the funding organisation(s) • Delegated authorities: The assurance management accountabilities, responsibilities and delegated authority for each programme's governance body, governance individual or supporting office (for example, programme office) • Working with partners outside the programme: How the programme governance bodies and individuals, and supporting offices, work with equivalent structures that exist outside the programme's organisational structure, including in partner organisations and the permanent organisation • First level of assurance: What assurance management activity will be provided by the first line of assurance and when • Second level of assurance: What assurance management activity will be provided by the second line of assurance and when • Third level of assurance: What assurance management activity will be provided by the third line of assurance and when • Level of effort and cost: An estimate of the investment required for assurance management activity • Evaluation: Process timing and success factors for evaluating the integrated assurance management approach |