HUMANITARIAN ACADEMY · HUMANITAIRES JOBS

Mini MBA Project Management and AI: PMP, PRINCE2, Agile and PMD Pro applied to humanitarian work

Course handout · Week 1 : The humanitarian project, its cycle and the landscape of methodologies

A programme of exactly 3 months (12 weeks, 144 hours) to manage humanitarian projects with the main methodologies and artificial intelligence: project cycle, PMBOK and PMP, PRINCE2, Agile (Scrum, Kanban) and hybrid approaches, Project DPro (PMD Pro), logical framework, theory of change and results-based management, planning and critical path, donor budget and earned value, risks and stakeholders, MEAL, donor reporting, change management, leadership and closure. At every step, AI (Claude, Gemini, Copilot and project management tools) is used methodically, protecting the data of the people we serve. Corrected numerical exercises, three monthly exams with case studies, and a verifiable diploma from the Humanitarian Academy. Independent preparation programme: it does not award the PMP, PRINCE2 or PMD Pro certifications, which are obtained through the official exams.

https://humanitairejobs.org/en/academy/mini-mba-gestion-projet-ia/semaine-1/

Free document from the Humanitarian Academy. It may be printed and shared freely for training purposes, without modification.

Week 1 : The humanitarian project, its cycle and the landscape of methodologies

Objectives

- Define a project, a programme and a portfolio, and distinguish a humanitarian project from ongoing operations.
- Describe the humanitarian project cycle and compare it with the cycles of PMBOK, PRINCE2, Agile and Project DPro (PMD Pro).
- Choose an approach (predictive, adaptive or hybrid) according to uncertainty, the donor and the context.

Project, programme, portfolio

A **project** is a **temporary** endeavour undertaken to create a unique result: building 40 water points, delivering cash transfers to 3,000 households for six months, opening a mobile clinic. It has a start, an end, a budget, a team and defined objectives.

A **programme** groups several related projects to obtain benefits that no single project would deliver: for example a food security programme combining a cash project, an agricultural project and a nutrition project. A **portfolio** is all the projects and programmes of an organisation or country office, managed to achieve the strategy.

Operations, by contrast, are continuous: payroll, fleet management, warehouse upkeep. Many failures come from a confusion: a project that turns into an endless operation, with no clear budget or owner.

> This programme is independent. PMI, PMP, CAPM and PMBOK are marks of the Project Management Institute; PRINCE2 is a mark of PeopleCert; Project DPro and PMD Pro belong to PM4NGOs. The Mini MBA prepares for and introduces these methods; it does not award their certifications.

The humanitarian project cycle

Most humanitarian organisations follow a cycle of five or six stages, inspired by the European Commission's project cycle management:

1. **Identification**: needs assessment, context and actor analysis, decision to intervene.
2. **Design**: problem analysis, theory of change, logical framework, budget, proposal to the donor.
3. **Start-up and detailed planning**: contract, recruitment, work plan, MEAL plan, procurement plan.
4. **Implementation and monitoring**: activities, indicator tracking, risk and change management.

5. **Evaluation**: mid-term or final, using the OECD DAC criteria.
6. **Closure**: final report, financial closure, handover, lessons learned.

The cycle is not linear: monitoring feeds adjustments, and the lessons of one project feed the design of the next. In an acute emergency, stages overlap: we distribute before having a perfect logframe, and regularise afterwards.

Landscape of methodologies

Project management methods do not compete; they answer different needs:

- **PMBOK and PMP** (Project Management Institute, United States): a body of knowledge, principles and performance domains, widely used worldwide; the PMP certification is the best known in the private sector and many agencies.
- **PRINCE2** (PeopleCert, United Kingdom): a method structured by principles, practices and processes, with clear roles and control points; common in the UK, Europe and government-funded projects.
- **Agile** (Scrum, Kanban): adaptive approaches in short cycles, born in software and useful when the solution is not known in advance.
- **Project DPro (formerly PMD Pro)** (PM4NGOs): a guide and certification designed for the development and humanitarian sector, integrating the logframe, MEAL and donor requirements.
- **Logical framework and results-based management (RBM)**: the design and accountability tools required by most donors (European Union, UN agencies, bilateral cooperation).

An effective humanitarian project manager borrows from each: the budget and contract rigour of predictive methods, PRINCE2's continued justification, Agile's short cycles for what is uncertain, and the results language donors expect.

Predictive, adaptive or hybrid?

The approach is chosen by asking two questions: **is the solution known?** and **are requirements likely to change?**

- **Predictive** (or "waterfall"): when the deliverable is well defined and stable. Example: building a school from approved plans.
- **Adaptive** (agile): when we learn as we go. Example: designing a feedback and complaints mechanism with the community, or a data collection application.
- **Hybrid**: the most frequent case in humanitarian work. The contract, budget and logframe are fixed with the donor (predictive), but implementation arrangements are adjusted in short cycles to the context (adaptive).

Adaptive management is now encouraged by several donors, provided decisions are documented: why we change, on what data, with what approval.

Where AI helps in the project cycle, and where it must not decide

Generative AI (Claude, Gemini, Copilot, and the AI features built into project management tools) can help at every stage:

- **Identification**: summarising public needs assessments, structuring a context analysis from your documents.
- **Design**: proposing a problem tree, a first draft logframe, critiquing the coherence of a proposal.
- **Planning**: breaking down the work, proposing a schedule, spotting forgotten dependencies.
- **Monitoring**: preparing dashboards, summarising minutes, analysing anonymised qualitative feedback.
- **Reporting and closure**: first drafts of reports, synthesis of lessons learned.

Three rules apply throughout the programme: **never enter personal data about beneficiaries** into a tool not approved by your organisation; **check every figure** produced by AI; **keep the decision human** for anything affecting people (targeting, selection, security, recruitment).

> AI prepares, the project manager checks and decides. You remain responsible for everything you sign and send to the donor.

The role of the humanitarian project manager

The project manager is responsible for delivering the agreed results **within scope, schedule, budget and quality**, while protecting people. In humanitarian work, add:

- **accountability to affected populations** (Core Humanitarian Standard, CHS);
- **compliance with donor rules** (eligibility of expenditure, procurement, visibility, reporting);
- the **security** of staff and partners;
- **coordination** with clusters, authorities and other actors.

PMI also describes expected skills along three axes: **ways of working** (project management techniques), **power skills** (leadership, negotiation, communication) and **business acumen** (strategy, environment, value). The new exams give growing weight to the third axis.

Exercise: choosing the approach for three projects

Situation. The country office of the fictitious NGO Amana must launch three projects: A) rehabilitate 12 boreholes from validated technical plans, budget USD 360,000 over 10 months; B) design with three communities a feedback and complaints mechanism adapted to women and older people, budget USD 45,000; C) a 6-month emergency cash programme whose transfer value depends on changes in market prices.

Task. 1) Which approach for each project? 2) For A, what is the average monthly budget? 3) Which task can be given to AI in each, and which must it be denied?

Answer. 1) A: predictive (known, stable deliverable). B: adaptive (learning with communities in short cycles). C: hybrid (fixed contractual frame, transfer value revised according to market monitoring). 2) 360,000 ÷ 10 = USD 36,000 per month on average (actual spending will follow the works schedule). 3) A: AI can propose the work breakdown and the schedule; it does not validate the engineers' technical choices. B: AI can synthesise anonymised feedback; it does not choose channels without consultation. C: AI can help analyse public price series; it does not select beneficiary households.

Key takeaways

- A project is temporary and unique; a programme groups related projects; a portfolio serves the strategy.
- The humanitarian project cycle runs from identification to closure, with continuous monitoring and lessons learned.
- PMBOK/PMP, PRINCE2, Agile, Project DPro and the logframe are complementary.
- The hybrid approach is the most common: predictive contractual frame, adaptive implementation.
- AI prepares, people check and decide; no personal beneficiary data in a non-approved tool.

Quiz

1. A project differs from an operation because it is:
   A. More expensive
   B. Temporary and produces a unique result
   C. Always donor-funded
   D. Managed by headquarters

2. Which framework was designed specifically for the development and humanitarian sector?
   A. PRINCE2
   B. Scrum
   C. Project DPro (PMD Pro)
   D. PMBOK

3. To co-design a complaints mechanism with communities, the most suitable approach is:
   A. Adaptive, in short cycles
   B. Strictly predictive
   C. No method
   D. The donor's only

4. Most donor-funded humanitarian projects are managed in a way that is:
   A. Purely agile
   B. Without a schedule
   C. Purely predictive
   D. Hybrid

5. Which task must never be delegated to AI?
   A. Proposing a report outline
   B. Summarising minutes
   C. Selecting beneficiary households
   D. Spotting dependencies in a schedule

Quiz answers : 1. B · 2. C · 3. A · 4. D · 5. C