

# APMG EVALUATION SERVICE FOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT PRODUCTS

## SILVER REPORT

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*Product:* **MicroP2**

This report covers the Silver Stage assessment of MicroP2, an application from Novare Consulting Ltd., that I conducted between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> July 2006.

MicroP2 is a simplified project management method for small low-risk projects and work packages. It is based on PRINCE2 and was authored by members of the team that designed and wrote that methodology. It is designed to help both experienced and inexperienced project managers by combining the project management method with 'E-Learning' and a 'Project Centre'.

MicroP2 is written using ASP.NET. A version of the MySQL Server database is included on the installation CD, but the system is also compatible with SQL Server 2005. Both client/server and Web hosted versions are available.

Upon logging into the system, which runs in a standard Web browser (Microsoft Internet Explorer version 6 or later, Mozilla Firefox and Netscape are supported, but Internet Explorer is recommended), you see a basic navigation screen containing the Main Menu. The 'Introduction to MicroP2' option gives you access to a series of screens that explain what the system is, what it does and how to use it. There are also links to documents that explain the MicroP2 process model and description, a project management guide and an explanation of the relationship between PRINCE2 and MicroP2. Where appropriate, the documentation uses interactive diagrams and contains hyperlinks cross referencing related pieces of information.

It is in the 'Project Centre' that the actual management of projects is done. Selecting this option from the Main Menu takes you to the Project Centre screen showing, on the left-hand side, a navigation bar and on the right-hand side a list of the projects currently open. In the centre is a list of your programmes and, below that, a list of your projects containing details of the programmes in which they belong with RAG indicators showing whether the projects are on time, delayed or overdue. When a project is finished, it is marked as complete but remains in this list.

A click on the name of a project takes you to a page that lists all of the template documents held for that project. The system contains a tailored subset of the PRINCE2 templates relevant to the requirements of MicroP2, which provide MicroP2 Project Managers with the management products needed to deploy the method. When a new project is created, all of these templates are copied to its folder, ready for editing. A team member with the appropriate rights may use a

drop-down list to check out a document. Thereafter an icon is displayed in a 'Status' column showing who currently has the document. The team member would save the document into their own workspace to edit using Microsoft Word. When finished, he or she would check it back in again, either as a new version or as an amendment to an existing version. The version number of all documents is displayed in a column for that purpose and document histories may be displayed. Any version of a document can be opened for viewing.

Project members without the security rights to amend project documentation can still view the documents and copy them into their own work area in order to work on them. However, they can't then save them back to the system but have to submit them via someone with higher security rights (who is also able to upload additional documents to the project and add additional users to the system).

A project may also be opened with links to the e-learning system, increasing the level of help available when working on that project. However, when completing project documents accessed via the e-learning process screen, it is necessary to return to the Project Centre and check the document back in so that you can save it, there being no automatic check in facility available.

From the Project Centre, if you click on a programme name, you can reach a screen listing all of the projects within that programme. Programme managers can add programme members, allowing them to see all of the documents for projects within that programme and can also add new projects to the programme.

There is an icon on the Project Centre screen that enables you to view a list of all of the programmes detailed in the system and from here you can also add new projects to programmes.

Whilst assessing the product, I encountered only one issue of a serious nature. The system allowed only one System Administrator. I considered that this had serious security implications in the event that this person was to become unavailable for any reason. Novare Consulting has adjusted the software and the system now permits an unlimited number of administrators.

I also felt that three improvements could be made to the system to make it easier to use. Firstly, a search function to cover documentation and the included e-learning and e-books would be useful. Secondly, an archive function for old projects would help to de-clutter lists and, thirdly, the ability for users with higher security levels to auto check out and check in documents would also be useful. Novare Consulting will investigate the possibility and practicality of including these features.

Novare Consulting Ltd. has indicated that, in their opinion, the design and use of this product falls within the field of guidance offered by the OGC Business Change Guidance documents covering Project Management. I fully agree that using the MicroP2 system in the way that it has been designed to operate will assist compliance with the guidance provided in that document.

The printed publicity material submitted with this application consisted of:

- 1) A 'Best Practice' brochure.

- 2) A mailshot postcard.
- 3) A 'MicroP2' brochure.
- 4) A 'Novare Consulting' brochure that contained a section about MicroP2.
- 5) A PowerPoint presentation.

I have carefully studied each of these documents. In the MicroP2 brochure, and repeated in the PowerPoint presentation, I found the statements 'Easy to understand and use' and 'Simple navigation tools'. These are subjective statements and depend upon the capabilities of the user. However, they are principally advertising 'puff' and as such I think that they are unlikely to mislead any potential purchaser of the product.

Novare Consulting Ltd. does not yet have any information on their Web site concerning MicroP2.

I did not find any other claims or statements that could be construed as misleading and consider that these documents fairly represent the capabilities of the products.

Consequently, I recommend that MicroP2 be given the Silver Award and suggest that this assessment should now proceed to the Gold Stage. I suggest that Novare Consulting Ltd. is invited to supply details of two clients who have been using this application during the course of their business for a sufficient period to become well versed in the way that it works. My intention is to interview the people who use this software and discover whether their opinion is that it works as it should.

S. Cotterell  
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