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Welcome

Welcome to Issue 19 of Project Management Tipoffs, the newsletter from Arras People which concentrates on project management and careers.

In this issue we look at the some of the issues and topics that have been high on our agenda recently, our survey, carried out earlier this year, gave us much to think about (it's still available for download if you've missed it) and in this issue of Tip-offs we ask the question Is PRINCE2 good enough? Also in this issue we cover graduates and project management - project managers of the future? Careers advice covered in this issue includes the competency based interview and giving your CV a spring clean. We've recently produced some careers advice brochures available to download - read on for more information.

As ever, feedback, comments and opinions are welcome and if you're interested in submitting an article for future editions please contact us. Next month we'll be looking at Project Management Styles - the softer skills in project management.

Prince2 – Still top of the charts but is it good enough?

A recent survey by **Arras People** received responses from 1,225 permanent and contract Programme and Project Professionals during January 2007. Once again it showed that Prince2 is the nation's favourite accreditation in the Project Management field holding its position during 2006 with strong anticipated demand in 2007. Excellent news for the many training organisations but is it really the best way forward for the profession, our employers or our clients?

In my own mind there is a raging debate, here at Arras we are constantly faced with the situation where candidates have spent their money, taken their Prince2 exams and having the "keys to the door" are now looking for their first role in Project Management. Somebody must have told them that it is as easy as that!

I personally see Prince2 as a "badge" and in the grand scheme of "Excellence in Project Management" it is the very first rung of the ladder teaching basic principals and language, it does not prepare people for the practical aspects of real delivery nor does it link into an individual's knowledge and experience. The fact that you can take the Foundation and Practitioner level exams on the same day fundamentally says to me that it has a limited worth!

On top of doubling up, the fact that it should be "retaken" every three to five years is astonishing! Why would any right minded individual renew this "badge" when it has no element which factors in the experience they have gained during those three to five years?

I realise that it is difficult to establish recognised professional development standards, but APM, PMI, IPMA you are surely missing a trick and not serving the best interests of your members by standing to one side and allowing the Prince2 bandwagon to roll on unchallenged. As professionals, employers and clients we all should be asking for more!

What is Competency Based Interviewing?

Arras People spends a lot of time preparing people for interviews and some organisations prefer the competency based interviewing technique.

Competency based interviewing essentially enables an interviewer to "predict future behaviour based on your past behaviour" and concentrates on assessing the core competencies of the role you're applying for.

The competencies (the ability to apply your skills and knowledge) are usually found on most job specifications these days and for a project manager here are some examples;

Flexibility and Adaptability
Communicates change in a positive manner. Is able to adopt an appropriate style given the environment and audience, in response to subtle signals

Effective Communication
Is effective in facilitating meetings and workshops. Is able to provide concise summary of long discussions in which different participants have put forward a wide range of arguments

Time Management and Prioritisation
Is able to set tasks and manage workload of others. Is able to determine which tasks are more critical in the work of others

Project Team Management
Is able to identify issues/non action by project team members and resolves effectively through action or escalation

In terms of preparing for a competency based interview, many believe that its very difficult to do so, but there is a simple method you can use - **CAR -** taken from the

Graduating into Project Management

There are two fundamental questions that Arras are asked by Students and Graduates: "Why and how do I get into project management?"

Higher fees are forcing students and graduates to think more closely about their career, in some cases even as they are selecting their subjects to study. In the last decade alone there has been a clear rise in the vocational subjects that have clear post graduation career paths.

From enquiries alone it is clear to Arras that many more graduates are considering Project Management as a career option. During my time as Project Management lecturer and tutor I was frequently asked by students how they could progress their Project Management careers. Reflecting on my own career, I realised that projects had always played a part, and I had learnt the technical bits and tools of the trade as I went along, and that I had never taken a conscious decision to become a professional project manager.

So how do graduates climb the project management ladder?

The key to a long and rewarding project career is undoubtedly experience.   This may require you specialising in a particular market or even in particular subject matter (such as project governance, planning or risk management).
For a student or graduate the first step is to gain exposure to the project environment. This might be through technical skill (say engineering or IT competence) or in an administrative role. Look to the roles to which you aspire and see how these people work. What are they doing? How do they use their time? Do you feel they are effective in what they do?

Taking the next step is not always easy or fair, but looking at my own experience, progression often came by being in the right place at the right time, and seizing any opportunity that arrives. If you are already in employment, volunteer for extra duties that gain you additional responsibility or show off what you can really achieve; if you are still a student, see if your tutor is undertaking any commercial or funded projects where you could be allowed you to develop your project management skills; you do need to ensure that your current role or studies do not suffer because of this. Many organisations reward people who are prepared to go the extra mile and soon extra responsibility is coming your way.

Whilst the subject of your degree might not be important effective professionals know the value of continued professional development and project managers are no less so. The current Arras People Survey found that:
"Employers are demanding professional accreditation, and the majority of respondents believe that accreditation will increase their earning power, though many question the validity or benefits of this requirement"

If you are determined to follow a career in project management then perhaps you be should be looking to gain accreditation to one or more of the following: PMI (PMP®, CAPM® or PgMPSM), AMP (APMP, CPM) or OGC (Prince2; MSP); if you do not know what these terms mean perhaps you should be finding out!

Project managers operate in most markets and sectors to greater or lesser degree; in fact it is difficult to think of an area where project management is not relevant. If you want a challenging and rewarding career then look no further.

University of Kent - Context, Action and Result. For each competency listed on the job specification you can begin to formulate some answers (or at least have a practice run through)

So what kind of questions can you expect?

Let's take the **Time Management and Prioritisation** competency. A likely question;

Have you ever managed a project which you knew would run over the timescale?

By applying the CAR method essentially your answer would include the **Context** - telling the interviewer about such a time (setting the scene), **Action** - what did you do? **Result** - what was the outcome?

In the answer you're giving the interviewer will be listening for evidence such as "prioritisation, working in a structured and methodical way, planning ahead to ensure timely delivery of results, managing time effectively, maintaining accurate documentation." The interviewer will also be listening for actions that are deemed to be "negative indicators" for the competency, for example;
"Works late but unproductively most of the time, seldom completes a task unless they do all of the work themselves, reactive approach, inflexible in modifying plan/priorities, is easily fazed by obstacles /interruptions" Monster
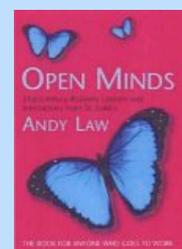
A lot of organisations also like to use this interviewing technique to enable them to easily make comparsions across all the applicants they have interviewed - the interview ultimately becomes less subjective

For Further Information:

> University of Kent

> Monster

Books Worth Reading

Open Minds: 21st Century

> See our new careers advice page

"Tackling Managed Services Companies"

Oh I love the headline, sounds like we have a tax dodger on every street corner, corrupting the nation and leading us all in to rack and ruin!

Quick, call in the Treasury Departments hit squad!

What I can't work out is what is the Governments real agenda here?

With the Treasury targeting the estimated 250,000 contractors who were managing their business affairs through composite companies it makes me wonder who these people are and how much they are earning because the numbers don't stack up for me!

Whilst the Treasuries estimate that they will be able to recover between £350M and £1Billion from these changes to the system may on first sight seem rather a large sum. However, if my math is right that divides up to a grand sum of £1,400 to £4,000 per contractor in PAYE and National Insurance contributions per annum. Divided again by 12 (because we are all now treated as employees) this is £116 to £333 pound per month each!

I can't believe that the Treasury are estimating that these people pay no tax at all and as such can only see that they looking for an easy way to swell their coffers by taking additional tax?

My conclusion? What it says to me is that they just don't know what is happening in the market place and as such have decided to take on an easily identifiable group in the workforce. My concern would be with such easy pickings which group will they go for next?

Further information -

Treasury Department - "Tackling Managed Service Companies" Section 5.98 (large PDF)

Contractor UK - PBR: Back to the future for IT contractors

CV Spring Clean

Running a feather duster through your CV is key to giving yourself the best possible chance of gaining a new job or contract

Here are our top eight quick and easy fixes to giving your CV a spring clean;

- **1, 2, 3 or beyond** - Generally speaking we like to see candidates CVs no longer than three pages. If its two pages and it does everything you want it to do – great! If not, going to three pages is fine
- **Spell checker -** An obvious one eh? Just make sure you also use the grammar checker to effective use too and avoid American spellings such as organization and organisation. MS Word has a nasty habit of changing these frequently. As a side note I think the most mis-spelt word in some of the CV's we've seen is "liaising"
- **Personal details** - The CV doesn't necessarily have to carry all your personal details here at the top; it works equally well at the bottom (At the end of the CV). You must of course have your name displayed prominently at the top of the CV and there is no

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Business Lessons and Innovations from St Lukes
by Andy Law

St Lukes is a leading creative communication company that was responsible for the Ikea "chuck out the chintz", Eric Cantona on Eurostar and the exploding Gremlins (from DFES Literacy and Numeracy campaign).

St Lukes succeeded by re-defining how to run an effective business. This is not about creatives trying to be different but a successful business strategy that challenges, inspires, enriches and rewards all those who work within it.

This book tells the store of how St Lukes was created and is first few years of operation.

Andy Law made a conscious decision to create an organisation that allows everyone to contribute to the best of their ability. He openly admits that not everyone could work in such a collaborative and innovative environment and this was shown by those that chose to leave.

Even if you do not decide to transform your entire organisation this book has many lessons that can be translated to the more traditional workplace. I found that book gripping so much that I read it cover to cover in 24 hours (didn't talk to the wife much though).

Relevancy to Project management?

Advertising campaigns are managed as projects. Many of the concepts will be very familiar to Project Managers but are given a fresh spin. One example I particularly liked was St Luke's approach to war rooms. They take it further, decorating the space to reflect the needs of the target audience. The space is then available to staff, clients and external partners alike to use the space when discussing the project. The idea behind this is to reinforce who the project is for or is helping.

Reviewed by Michael Hides

Project, Programme and Change Management Toolkit from IDeA

Content for local authorities and public sector organisations to help "establish a culture of strong project and programme management skills"

need for the words "Curriculum Vitae – CV"

- **Key achievements** - Key achievements or straight onto your works experience? It's often good practice to include 5 or 6 concise bullet points highlighting your key achievements to date – especially if there are areas which you think relate very well to the role you're applying for
- **Dates** - Make sure the dates are clear, when you started and finished the role – make sure you include the Month and Year.
- **Gaps** - Explain any gaps in the dates, for example if you completed your last role in March 2006 and went travelling for a year, make sure its clearly recorded and add a few interesting details about where to went and any activities you carried out
- **Where You Worked** - Introduce the company you have worked for instead of just listing the company name, add details about the department you specifically worked in
- **Job Title** - Make your job title very clear; it's remarkable how often we see CV's where this is not very clear. Don't let the reader have any cause for concern or suspicious, list your job title exactly as it was in the organisation you worked for, there will be plenty of opportunity when listing your skills and experience to really convey what this job title and job entailed

Lindsay Scott, Project Office Consultant, Arras People

> For a full downloadable CV Advice document from Arras People, visit our new Careers Advice pages

The Apprentice Visits Arras!

In the latest installment of the hit TV programme "The Apprentice" the two teams visited the French market town of Arras. The Project Manager and The Apprentice was covered in an previous article and its interesting to note in this series that the title of "Project Manager" seems to have been dropped, with the title of "Team Leader" taking precedence for the role of the person who takes a leadership position. Interestingly, also in this series it seems to be the team leader getting the chop every week - I guess the buck stops with the Project Manager (or Team Leader!)

Visit the Job Board for further vacancies

Project Management Blog

How to Manage a Camel

We set up this blog to share with you what we at Arras and you are thinking, reading and hearing. We will post reviews and comments for you to consider and have your 2 penny worth to share with the Arras Community