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Welcome

Welcome to Issue 21 of Project Management Tipoffs, the newsletter from Arras People which concentrates on project management and careers. Firstly - apologises for re-sending the last version of Tipoffs last week! In this issue we take a closer look at what you - project management professionals - think about what makes a good project manager? Specifically what softer skills you think a good project manager should have. The results from our short survey are surprising in some areas; communication is far and above the most important core skill a project manager can have and life experience wasn't has important as we believed.

As ever, feedback, comments and opinions are welcome and if you're interested in submitting an article for future editions please contact us. In the October edition of Tipoffs we'll be looking at making the switch from permanent to contract and from contract to permanent - the pros, cons and other things to be aware of.

The Results are in... It's all about Communication!



Last month we looked at the core attributes and key soft skills that make good Project Managers and asked you to comment on our initial thoughts. The first two questions asked you to rank our suggestions and then you had a chance to offer your thoughts.

For the first two questions we took your responses and added a weighting factor of 7 for most important down to 1 for least important to give us a complete picture. I know that there may be statisticians out there who may already be crying foul at our technique but remember this is not deciding the fate of the world.

1. Please order these core attributes of a project manager in order of importance ([to see the core attributes again - click here](#))

Anyway back to the results and we can see that each core attribute gained a response although Competence and Attitude came out clear leader scoring twice as much as Life Experience (see Fig 1)



If we look at just the core attribute selected as the *most important* the difference is even more distinct. In fact in this instance Attitude is seen as slightly more important than Competence but surprisingly (or perhaps not) no one felt that Life experience was the single most important core attribute (see Fig 2).

What does this say about Project Managers? Obviously that we feel that with competence and the right attitude we are most successful. This is borne out by employers who will most often list value these through accreditation and experience



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[Tools, Techniques and Approaches - PPSOSIG](#)



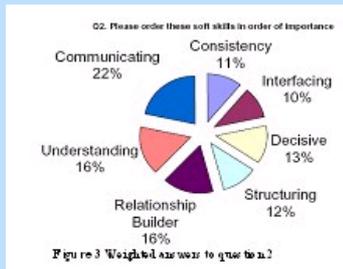
The Next PPSOSIG conference - 27th - 28th September - Just 10 spaces available!

For Further Information:

- > [PPSOSIG](#)
- > [The Next Event](#)

(competence?) and terms such as "Can do" attitude.

2. Please order these soft skills in order of importance (see the list of soft skills)



From the perspective of soft skills we see a similar picture with Communicating and Understanding coming out as clear winners. This is perhaps hardly surprising given that projects are all about people. But given this result how much time do spend investing in this soft skill. When do you last pay for a communication course? How do you improve your understanding skills? Might be worth thinking about?



3. Please state what you see as the most crucial soft skill in a project manager - answer may not necessarily be any of the skills listed above & Q4 Why have you chosen that particular "soft skill"?

We obviously were on the right track with our thoughts on the soft skills as these were generally reinforced. Some of the comments that were offered really underpin our thinking.

Core Skill	Percentage of people who suggested it
Communicating/communication/Effective or Good communication	Strongest response almost 30%
Building Relationships or Relationship Builder	Followed by 7% of respondents
Understanding	6% of respondents
Get people to do things/Persuasion	5% of respondents
Active Listening	
Problem Solving	
Ability to understand others	
Ability to work in a structured way	
Ability too stay cool under pressure	Other soft skills chosen by your peers
Awareness	
Decisive	
Drive and Vision	
Empathy	
Imagination	
Influencing	
Integrity	
Interfacing	
Interpersonal skills	
Organisational skills	
People Manager	
Personnel management	
Social Skills	
Stakeholder Management	
Structuring	
Teamwork	
Wholistic thinking	

Project Management Careers Clinics

The Careers Clinic at Arras People has been running for a number of years now and recently we've changed our free service to a charity donation service*. With £10 going to one of our three nominated charities - you can now receive good advice, tips, help on your CV whilst giving to charity.

> [Project Management Careers Clinic](#)

> [Link to our Careers Advice page](#)

* Arras People has introduced the £10 fee to charity as a way of ensuring booked slots were attended by the booker

Here's a selection of what you had to say

"By working in a structured way, a project manager will be able to think logically, communicate across the project board and deliver the benefit of project more easily."

"A project is doomed to failure if the project manager cannot communicate at all levels. Each type of participant on a project will need different types and methods of communication. Explaining a business requirement to a developer will need different communication skill than say reporting to the project board. Similarly translating Techie speak into a language that a non-technical person can understand is also an art form."

"It doesn't matter how good a plan is, if you do not communicate to the relevant suppliers and stakeholders what is to be done then the whole thing will fall apart"

"Because a project is done within a context. You need to see the whole picture, not only the stated scope, cost and time but business objectives, hidden agendas, etc. Sometimes the most important project objectives are not the visible ones but the non visibles."

The intention of the article last month was to get us all thinking about our soft skills. We recognised that we were biased by our own experiences and that may mean that we overlooked some things. That was the purpose of question 4, to see what else you might come up with.

The additional points you may feel can be incorporated into the existing categories but equally we felt that these were sufficiently unique perspectives that they deserved to be highlighted separately.

In terms of the ability to stay cool under pressure our contributor added that *"No matter what goes wrong, PM needs to stay cool, not panic and just focus on the important stuff."* I do not know about you but I think we have all met people that positively thrive in these environments. Some even create the crisis to demonstrate how good they are at this.

A couple of people identified Active Listening as an important core skill. This reinforces the fact that communication is very much a two way process.

"It lays the ground for the skills that have to do with relating to others and informs the skills that have to do with taking action"

"If you can't listen then you won't hear. If you don't hear then your actions may well be misinformed and dangerous."

Why not try being quiet for once and you might learn something? At the very least it will make your colleagues wonder what is wrong!

"There are tipping points in projects when a number of factors combine to turn a project. Being intuitively aware of when that is happening is a crucial soft skill."

This is obviously taking the core attribute of intuition and developing it to aid your management approach. What would be the best way to develop this? Experience? Training course?

The final point is imagination where our contributor remarks. *"There is a distinctly creative element to successful project and programme management. It takes imagination to anticipate problems, and take pre-emptive steps to have the necessary elements available to be able to take corrective action"*

This relates back to the article last time of whether project management was a science or an art. Our whole society is geared towards a very scientific way of looking at the world – which we know only uses the right hand side of the brain. By unlocking the creative left side we naturally use more of our brain to solve problems. I am not sure about the prospect of seeing some of the Project Managers we know doing sculpture or painting landscapes, but just as effectively playing a musical instrument gets the creative juices flowing.

So what does it all mean?

We have looked at the core attributes and soft skills that we all feel are important in a Project Manager and you reinforced that we were on the right track. Looking at many of our jobs the things we highlighted were identified by employers as things they would look for in a candidate.

The real interesting lesson comes from looking at your CVs. How often

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

do you think you identified the core attributes or highlighted your soft skills. Now before you rush to add two new lists to your submissions it is worth taking a moment to think about how you will demonstrate these 'found' attributes and skills. I will leave you to ponder on that one.

We hope that you found our little survey illuminating and far from trying to deliver a definitive view of a project manager our aim is always to stimulate debate. If you do not agree with the answers – did you contribute to the survey? > [Visit the Blog and add your thoughts](#)

Thank you for everyone that did take the time to share their thoughts and as promised the two winners selected at random for the Your Programme Project Management Centre Of Excellence - A Strategic Guide were:

Anne McArthur and **Williams Shand** - thank you for participating and your book will be with you shortly.



Designing Your Programme Project Management Centre Of Excellence - A Strategic Guide

Michael Hides and Ian McKenzie, Project Management Consultants, Arras

PRINCE2 Meets the Grumpy Old Man

I Cannot Believe It!

Is it really true, am I going all Victor Meldrew in my old age? I really can not help myself having seen the latest output from the PRINCE2 website regarding the changes to the format of the PRINCE2 Practitioner exam, which if you weren't aware is changing from 1st September 2007.



The document, available at (PDF)

[www.prince2.org.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.asp?](http://www.prince2.org.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.asp?IID=1142&slD=365)

[IID=1142&slD=365](http://www.prince2.org.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.asp?IID=1142&slD=365) is an amazing read, explaining why the prestigious and much sought after qualification is now to be an "Objective Testing Exam" or in old currency multiple choice! Now don't get me wrong, I have not accused anybody of "dumbing down": the changes, of course, are to make them more acceptable to the growing international market. Oh, and of course: to bring a significant time reduction in delivering results to candidates! Now in my day a product that was aimed at an international audience would be "localised" to meet the local market requirements not changed at source to accommodate international requirements! I am being naïve here or just suffering the Meldrews? Ok, so it's being changed to speed up the results for the candidates, ah, customer focussed, just what we all want to hear! Oh no, Meldrew strikes again! Am I being cynical, or has the monster grown too big and now we need a computer to mark the papers so that the cash cow can be milked?

And finally, yes "there will be very little writing involved so therefore the exam will be easier for those unused to writing for extended periods of time". Make your own opinion, but I would love to see their PID!

Want to add your thoughts and comments? [Visit the Blog](#)

Comment by John Thorpe, Arras People