

Project Management

Career Change

arras PEOPLE

Contents

Introduction	3
I'd like to get into PM	3
The Best Way In	4
Leaving Your Job	5
Project Management Training	6

arras PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION

In our “New to Project Management – Graduates Guide” we mentioned that the most frequently asked question we get asked when people get in touch for general enquiries is “How do I get into a project management role?”

Often the second part of the conversation is “I’m not in a project management role at the moment but I’d like to get into it”

The enquiry is generally from someone who has gained work experience – and that can be any experience at all – and they’ve expressed an interest in project management through either something in their current job, through friends or family or through other media.

We’re going to attempt to give some general advice for people looking to change their careers and make a move into project management, an attempt because, of course, there are literally hundreds of different jobs out there and we can’t cover them all i.e., we can’t give a dedicated piece on “from marketing manager to project manager in ten easy steps!”

“I’m not in a project management role at the moment but I’d like to get into one”

The first response we give to this question is why?

At this point we’re not interested in the role you’re performing today (harsh as that might sound!), until we really understand what your drivers are in wanting to make that move into project management and why would project management want you?

I’D LIKE TO BE A PM

Why do you want to leave the job you’re currently doing and go and do another one in a totally different field? What is motivating you to think seriously about making this move? What work have you already done in researching the project management field? Why is this job the right job for you? What do you dislike about your current job and what do you really like about it?

All questions that you need to be asking yourself and answering honestly.

Hopefully you will have already given your career change much thought because the journey into project management could be a tough one and you’ll need to stay positive and remember why you’re doing this.

Some good advice on career changes is available on the web:

http://www.quintcareers.com/career_change.html

http://jobsearch.about.com/od/careeradvice/Career_Change_How_to_Change_Careers.htm

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/careers/graduates/change/>

THE BEST WAY IN

Answers to our why question have been wide ranging – from “good pay” to “I think I’m doing a lot of the project manager role today in my current job and I want to take that up more permanently” to “a friend of mine is a Project Manager and I thought it sounded good” and “I’ve just done a PRINCE2 course and I’m ready to get a job”.

The best way into project management

If you talk to any Project Managers about their career to date and how they managed to get where they are today you’ll soon discover that their path to project manager was a mixture of accidental—being in the right place at the right time (or wrong place at the wrong time if you’re talking to a disgruntled PM!) and choosing a particular role backed up with training / development.

Many Project Managers have natural ability to organize and lead, they are often good at getting things done and therefore “drift” towards a recognized PM role.

As such not many project managers actually engineered their first step into project management. So that makes your career change a little difficult – here’s our advice on how to “accidentally” find yourself in a project management role.

Before you jump ship from your current employer make sure you’ve unearthed any potential opportunities – especially as this is the **easiest option** and likely most successful option you currently have today.

- Discover where recognised projects are undertaken in your company and look to build links with those departments through networking with staff taking an interest in their activities and how they impact the role you have.

THE BEST WAY IN

- Get talking to colleagues in other departments across the business – you’ll be surprised just how much you don’t know about the business you’re in and where good opportunities might be for you
- Talk to the HR representative in your organisation and find out how you can be informed of new jobs coming up in different departments
- Talk to your line manager – find out if there are any “special” projects coming up in the department or organisation what you might be considered for. You’ll need to be ready with your credentials – “why should they consider you for this?”
- Within your current role volunteer to take on additional work to lead or work with in activities that deliver a change.
- Think about your current role – are you already carrying out some elements of your role in a project management fashion? If so, could you perform this role in a more structured and true project management way? Your line manager would be very interested to see how the department could perform better at its projects – regardless of how “informal” these projects are today – by better management. Talk to your manager about the possibilities of putting this into practice – but make sure you do your homework first.
- Start to talk in terms of delivery, cost, resources and time to get things done – think project

LEAVING YOUR JOB

If you really want to leave your current employer brace yourself for a difficult period – job hunting at the best of types can be a long drawn out process, full of the highs and lows, frustrations etc but ultimately finding a new job is a full time job in itself (be prepared to put in a full days work). It's also going to be even more difficult due to the change you want to make. In fact you need to organise your job hunt as you would run a project.

- Think about organisations that are in competition with your current/previous employer – it's easier if you have some direct skills, industry knowledge etc that you know an organisation would be specifically interested in. Research and find out about these organisations attitude and approach to project management – helping you to assess whether a competitor organisation does indeed have a more project centric approach to their work.
- Think about organisations that are not necessarily competitors to your previous employer but have very similar products, services, sector etc. Again you can capitalise on the finer experience you have to help get a foot in the door. And remember, make sure you also investigate the organisations approach to projects and project management.
- If you want to gain a new job in a totally different sector or business function consider volunteering. Volunteering does not have to be within the charity / not-for-profit sectors but it will mean perseverance to ensure you choose the right kind of opportunity and organisation which will help you gain the specific experience you're looking for.
See the Do It website—<http://www.do-it.org.uk>

PM TRAINING?

- Review your CV – is it going to work for you in the new field of project management? Is there anything you can do with your CV to show the examples of project management skills you have gained today even though you were not formally working within a project management role? Review our CV Advice article to assist you in re-working your CV

Will PRINCE2 training help me?

We get a lot of calls from people with limited project management experience asking this question; will taking a project management course like PRINCE2 help me gain employment in a project management role?

The short answer is no. (Or it depends!)

PM TRAINING

If you have had no or limited practical experience in project management, taking the PRINCE2 course is not going to make it any easier to walk into a project management role.

In essence having the qualification does not make you a project manager. It teaches you a method that a number of organizations use or a variation of, for controlling their projects.

In some cases a Job Specification will mandate that a Prince 2 or similar qualification is required. Having the qualification will get you past that hurdle however a good recruiter or hiring manager will be looking for your experience of project management within an environment of Prince or other methodology.

Ideally PRINCE2 courses are recommended to people who may have already been working with an implementation of the method for a while and are looking to formalize their knowledge. By all means go ahead and do the introduction or foundation course but hold off on the practitioner until you have some recognized project management experience.

In essence if you have no practical experience in project management but are PRINCE2 accredited (i.e., you've spent £2000 on a training course) you are not going to find it any easier to walk into a project management role than if you'd spent £2000 on something else.

There are many people in the project management market who have gained experience in a variety of roles, organisations and projects and yet have no PRINCE2 accreditation – these people will be competing against you for the roles on offer.

PM TRAINING

Simply put, having PRINCE2 accreditations do not qualify you to perform the role. PRINCE2, interestingly, has become a popular training course in project management but it is not the best course to take for a novice. PRINCE2 is just a method of delivering a project and the course does not actually go deep into the capabilities and skills of a project management.

If you want to gain specific project management knowledge, skills, concepts and processes and have money to spend on courses, take a look at the capability related courses;

APM—<http://www.apm.org.uk/>

PMI—<http://www.pmi.org>

ISEB—<http://www.bcs.org/server.php?show=nav.6941>

MSc—<http://www.lums.lancs.ac.uk/Postgraduate/msc-project-management/>

Arras People
The Project Management Recruitment Specialists

Arras House
47 York Street
Heywood
Lancashire OL10 4NN

Phone: 01706-366444
Fax: 01706-366544
www.arraspeople.co.uk
info@arraspeople.co.uk

arras PEOPLE