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"Of all the terms which raise a smile when I look at job specifications this is certainly one of my own personal favourites!!"

Looking for an excellent alternative to PRINCE2 for project management related information?

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Series 1 of our careers related articles starts with Project Manager Interviews-Skills & Knowledge*

Further series will be looking at interview questions relating to soft skills and more specialist questions for other project professionals*

Welcome to Project Management Tip-Offs.

You either subscribed directly for our newsletter or you signed up through the Arras People registration, either way - thank you!

This is our very first issue so we hope you find some if not all of its content useful! The aim behind the newsletter is to bring together information and resources all in the area of project management and project office. It's also UK based so we hope the content remains relevant to our readers. We wanted to bring important elements together in one place and also utilise the information Arras People can provide from the career side of project management and project office too. We hope we've got the blend right. If you'd like to contribute to future issues please get in touch, contact details are at the end of the email. If you'd like to comment on any of the content please don't hesitate to contact us.

BEING COMMERCIALLY AWARE!

Of all the terms which raise a smile when I look at job specifications this is certainly one of my own personal favourites!! "Why's that then?" I hear you ask.

Because I am constantly asking myself: what is this commonly used and abused term "commercially aware" that we see in adverts all the time? What do people mean by this phrase that trip's so easily off the tongue? More specifically, what does it may mean for us as practitioners in the field of Project Management?

So let's start by breaking it down:
The words **Commercial** and **Commercially**, both lead us to the word commerce - The buying and selling of goods and services. Whilst the word aware is defined as - Having knowledge or cognizance, being vigilant or watchful. So we are involved in the environment where goods and services are being bought and sold, we have knowledge, gained through one's own perceptions or by means of education and are looking out for what is dangerous or potentially so.

As an experienced project manager I can relate in some ways to that definition, but it is still so wide open in that I can't specifically put my finger on what that potential employer is looking for from me! Having looked around, I can not find a universally acceptable definition of the phrase. There are lots of words, but no easy way to either describe or measure what is meant. So I would like to start the task of building that definition in order that we can all have a shared view of what we mean. For now I will start with my headlines for the elements we must understand and appreciate in order to achieve this much desired "**commercial awareness**". In my own view this breaks down into four elements:

- Understanding the mechanics of commerce and business
- Developing appropriate personal skills, behaviours and attributes
- Understanding the impact of contract and law
- Developing industry specific knowledge

As a project manager I realise that commercial ignorance is not acceptable, being commercially aware is acceptable and is certainly different than being a commercial expert. I look forward to developing this theme over the coming issues of Projectip-offs, exploring each of these elements with you to create a framework for this much sought after capability.

Get Prepared for your Project Manager Interview

At Arras People we spend a lot of time preparing both project managers and project support professionals for their interviews. So much so, that we thought we'd share some of the best questions we have up our sleeves. We think both potential employees (yes, if you're getting ready for an imminent interview yourself you could be someone's next employee!) and clients (looking for further generic questions to supplement their own) might find these examples quite useful. In this 1st series we're looking at the project manager interview and specifically at those questions designed to find out about your project management skills and knowledge

- Give an example of how you tackle the initiation of projects?
- Describe how you have undertaken the practical application of a project methodology for a programme or project?
- Please discuss with examples how you undertake managing a project on a day to day basis?
- What is project management? Briefly describe the project lifecycle.
- What has been the most significant project you have worked on?
- What was your actual role in that project?
- What is the most important thing in project management?

Specific Skill Areas:

- RISK: How have you managed risks on a project you have run?
- CONTRACTS: Given a situation when we are delivering a project without a contract but on a promise that the customer will pay (they have always paid before), what are the issues?
- FINANCES: how do you start costing your projects? what experience do you have of building a change request for more money to complete your project?
- QUALITY: Consider the statement 'inadequate quality management will result in project problems'. Give an example of why this should be.
- ISSUES: What methods do you use to capture issues when initiating your projects?

Some of the latest white papers and information...

> Project Management Offices Are On The Rise. Published by Computer Weekly.

Excerpt "Most companies have established project management offices (PMOs) to help them enforce standard IT processes during IT/business projects, according to a report by Forrester Research"

Job Description Help:

BusinessBalls

HR Solutions Online

Human Resources Answers

Rice University Guidelines

Recommended site by PSOForum.com:
> www.techrepublic.com

Some of the latest white papers and information...

Cherish a Good Project Manager

Excerpt "...project management as a profession in its own right or something people do"

Event: 30 September 2003 - Aston University - Birmingham The PPSO Special Interest Group Conference

The topic for discussion is **Extending the PPSO into a Centre of Excellence.**

Tickets available from PSO Forum online

Contact Details:

Arras People
01706-366444

www.arraspeople.co.uk

Contributions from:

John W. Thorpe
Ian D. McKenzie
Lindsay Scott
PSO Forum
PPSO SIG
BusinessBalls
Alec.co.uk

CHANGE CONTROL: In terms of time quality and cost and time please give an example of how you have managed change? How did you identify and determine the impact of your change options? Give an example of where a requested change was refused and how you managed it?

Further Resources:

Great general interview questions from Alec: <http://www.alec.co.uk/interview/intqask.htm>
"Great Answers to Tough Interview Questions" 5th Edition Martin John Yate: Kogan Page £9

One of the good things the web was invented for... Giving you a head start on writing that job spec

Whether you're a Project Manager, Resource Manager, HR Assistant, or just someone who was wandering past the wrong desk at the wrong time when this task gets handed out, at some point you know you'll have to write that dreaded job specification.

Often these are needed on the project, not only to recruit someone when things are getting hectic but also as part of the project plan (roles and responsibilities being the posh term for job specs on a project!).

So where do you start? After hunting around the office for near on 2 weeks half heartedly and still not finding anything even half way decent, the deadlines banging on the door. So now you do what nearly everyone else does and start searching like mad on the Internet, hoping to pinch someone else's neat ideas and past them off as your own. Great idea if your organisation matches that of Phoenix City Council US ([Google Search - "Project Manager Job Spec"](#)) and your project manager role just happens to incredibly match there's as well!

Joking aside some of these searches can prove useful, at least you can find a decent enough format or template and if you're looking for something to form part of the project roles and responsibilities - simplicity is the key. When you're looking to put something together more formally - for an HR department say - this is where things can start to get more complicated. Which headings to use, how long should it be, what common adjectives should be use etc etc.

In future additions I'll share generic project roles job specifications with you, starting with the Project Manager. If you can't wait that long, look at reputable sites for live jobs that may give you a head start. PRINCE2 may also provide you with a good starting point, buy the book or raid a colleague's training notes.

Featured Website: PSO Forum (UK based)

The PSO Forum (Project Support Office) is the brainchild of Debra Ashcroft, a Resource Manager working within the Project Office area. Debra created the PSO Forum back in March 2001 to provide "a central information source for PPSO professionals". Today, the site contains the message forum, news, events, literature, information on tools and software.

Since 2001, project office professionals from across the UK and worldwide stumble across this little gem of a website everyday. With the forum providing a 'meeting place' for other like minded professionals in the area of Project Office to exchange views, ideas or just say hello.

Debra's idea for the site grew out of her own need for information in the Project Office field: "...when I first started to work in a project office and tried to look for books and papers on the subject so I could further my understanding of the new field. I was really disappointed to find that there was very little information to be found and that making contact with others in the field was extremely difficult."

The problem that many project office professionals have suffered from over the years: gaining professional recognition for their roles-have slowly started seeing new initiatives, qualifications, specialists interest groups and websites like PSO Forum which all help in the battle to increase the project office professionals career status.



So what's happening with the site in the future? Debra loves to receive feedback from the users of the forum to make sure the offerings on the site are responding to people's current hot topics. One area being explored is sure to be a winner with everyone- " more on-line resources ... simple Excel and Access solutions ... templates and downloads" which will certainly move the site to a truly knowledge sharing forum.

Like any internet based forum, its success lies with the users popping in and exchanging a message or two so drop by and see what information is on offer that could help you in your project office role.

How to Pick and Use Your Project Board

Have you inherited your project board? Has your project board got the right players, are they adding value, boards are often selected for political effect, not to affect delivery of your project.

Sometimes it is not clear to the project manager and the members of the board what they are there for Boards are more than just a chat and sandwich, more than a social meeting. Remember you might have spent all night preparing for it and they the board are there for the gathering a day out perhaps at a different location

Ask yourself what each member of the board is doing for you, not just what is their role,

what else can they influence, perhaps additional cash or other resources. Work with the sponsor to ensure that all your board are players with strong perhaps personal as well as business interests in your projects' success. Watch for the political point scoring and engineer the removal of the culprits based on what value is being added or should I say not added.

Remind the board that your success will also be their success and as with all projects internally clear communications and common understanding must be comprehended and promoted by the board to the outside world. An external communication plan for the board is valuable, don't just brief each member on their role, look to brief and debrief them on the messages they are sending and receiving on your project.

Finally Prince states "...the Board is appointed by corporate or programme management to provide overall direction and management of the project. The Project board is accountable for the success of the project and has responsibility and authority for the project within the remit (the Project Mandate, you do have a have a mandate don't you?) set by corporate or programme management.

Ask not what you can do for your project board ask what your project board can do for you!

Contribution by A Programme Office Manager for a Public Sector Organisation



Arras People is a new premier project management and project office recruitment business.

Based in Norden, Arras People has been in operation since October 2002, working with clients all across the UK. We first started working with the public sector and this relationship continues today. Other high profile clients soon followed and we have become successful in the finance and distribution sector too. Arras People does not confine itself to working with clients in specific industry sectors as project management and project office roles can be found in almost every organisation today.

Arras People operates a recruitment business and is part of Arras Services Ltd-the consulting element of our business. Together we are able to attract some of the best project management and project office professionals. Today we have over 1000 professionals registered with us.

Send contributions/feedback by mail, email or give us a call:

Project Management Tip-Offs c/o Arras People, 47 York Street Heywood Lancs OL10 4NN
Tel: 01706-366444 Fax: 01706-366544 Email: project.tipoffs@arraspeople.co.uk

Project Management Tip-Offs welcomes contributory articles from anyone with an interest in project management and project office