

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 second issue and we hope it is as well received as the 1st one. We're looking for feedback from our readers to see which areas interest you the most; is it the careers section - do you want to see more in this area including what's happening within the project management and project support job market? Or do you prefer to see articles written on topics relating to project management and support?

Take a few minutes to give your feedback via the form. We'd really appreciate it. If you'd like to contribute please contact us at: PM Tipoffs If you feel passionate about something in the project management field tell everyone about it. Our newsletter goes out to candidates and clients alike

The next step to becoming commercially aware

In all walks of life people make contracts.

It may be as simple as purchasing a lunchtime sandwich at one end of the spectrum, or a house at the other, with many things in between. As Project Managers this spread of activity could be seen to be a reflection of the very wide range of contractual activity that our programmes and projects may expose us to.

The added dimension for us is that we may be operating on either or both sides of the transaction. At one end we may be responsible for straight forward transactional purchases, whilst at the other we may be involved in the procurement or supply of highly complex products and services.

Managing and negotiating contracts can be a complex business, they ultimately regulate the relationship between the purchasing organisation and its suppliers. We all hope that once signed, the contract never sees the light of day again, but must recognise that if the contract is not right, the relationship will probably not be right either and ultimately the quality of the supply may well suffer too.

Whilst many organisations have professional commercial staff, trained with the knowledge and expertise to lead the commercial interface, it is my belief that as professional Project Managers we need to have an understanding of commercial frameworks and potential issues.

- A contract is a legally binding agreement, "A promise or a set of promises which the law will enforce" – Sir Fredrick Pollock.
- The agreement of an offer by one party and an unqualified acceptance by the other.
- The vehicle by which the risks inherent in a transaction are allocated between the buyer and the seller.

In this context, it is worth remembering that the contract does not have to be written down, it may be verbal and in some cases deemed by conduct.

So why do we bother writing it down? It's a great way of focussing the mind of the parties involved; it's an opportunity to add precision which will hopefully reduce the opportunity for dispute; Absence of a written contract may open the doors for implied terms to be introduced; Worst case it provides evidence of what was agreed should a dispute arise.

So key to creating a contract is the concepts of OFFER, ACCEPTANCE and CONSIDERATION. Our contract comes into effect when the OFFER is ACCEPTED for an agreed CONSIDERATION. Words I will be exploring in our next issue.

Interested in finding out why you ended up in this job...

Arras People decided to take part in this study "How do you give a good impression?" That's what research at Leeds University Business School and UMIST is trying to find out. Psychologists **Militza Callinan** and **Christine Daniels** are conducting a UK-wide study of what people do to *give a good impression when they are applying for jobs*.

The findings should help psychologists work out why people sometimes end up in the wrong job despite their efforts to make the right choices. The researchers are asking you to help with this study by spending about 20 minutes completing their online survey. You will not be asked for identifying information, the survey is completely anonymous and confidential. With your help this will be the largest study of its kind ever conducted in the UK.

Arras People will be able to share the research findings when published through this newsletter so if you'd like to contribute: [Start the Survey](#)

Careers

Competency Based Interviews. Equality in job application?

Let us start by exploring the word competency and then look at it in terms of an interview for both the interviewee and the prospective employee. According to one Webster's dictionary definition, competency "is the quality or state of being functionally adequate or have having sufficient knowledge, judgment, skill or strength for a particular duty or in a particular respect."

The interviewer is looking for clear signs that you the candidate have the skills and experience the role requires. For a competency based interview, carefully designed questions explore for the skills and experience required for the role. The same question set is used for each candidate to demonstrate that equal opportunity has been afforded to all, i.e. if two candidates compare their interviews they will probably note the usage of the same questions and will therefore have a higher level of confidence in the equality in the process.

It is likely that you got through to the interview by completing a role specific application form. The application form is tailored to the role exploring for specific experience and skills. The intent of the application form is again, that everyone has the same opportunity to relate his or her experience or ideas to the particular role. No one person is being excluded, this is becoming more important as diversity starts to head the agenda enforced by European and local country laws.

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tip-offs

A1 Candidates?

Recent communications for recruitment agencies included an article about what agencies are looking for in a successful candidate - an "A1 Candidate" would have at least 7 out of the following:

1. Be in employment
2. Command a salary that is appropriate to their current position
3. Be realistic about what their next move might be
4. Have no skeletons in their cupboard
5. Have skills that are needed in the current marketplace
6. Be able to show good solid recent achievements
7. Show steady or better career growth to date
8. Be able to communicate well
9. Be of an appearance that is applicable to their industry
10. "Work" well with the agency

Would you agree?

Source - Warren Kemp at www.warrenkemp.com

tip-offs

We asked your opinion on "Do you think having a PRINCE2 or ISEB PPSO qualification is important in your career development?"

Alot of clients ask that candidates have these qualifications but often the projects running don't even use PRINCE2. So what's it all about?

Currently 54% of you think its important, so

In preparing for the competency interview, the candidate should work with the job specification and map his or her own skill and experience. An important element that the interviewer or panel will be testing for is evidence of the experience so add to your preparation as many example as you can muster. Make sure those experiences are yours and be very careful to make them yours avoid the word "we" try to relate your experience or role, "I" it is what you did that is being sought.

If you do not have a particular piece of experience or cannot back it up with an example to mind, state that fact, go on to explain how you would approach the situation in question, and relate that to other experiences.

The competency based interview if designed, prepared and practiced correctly will assist both prospective candidate and employer in coming to the right decision.

If you would like to discuss this matter, further please send your comments and experiences via email to interviews@arraspeople.co.uk

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Getting ready for a project office support interview?

So you've got the interview all lined up and now all you need to do is give yourself the best possible chance of winning the potential employer over. I'm making the assumption you've done all the general interview preparation expected if anyone (got the map, know where it is, know who's interviewing you & what they do, seen their website and know something about the organisation) Of course you have!

But it's still difficult to try and guess what those interviewers might think about asking you, especially in a niche area role such as project support. Here are some to get you started...

What are your main reasons for applying for this role? / Why do you think you would be an ideal fit for this role? A simple question - so do your homework on the role specification and give a great answer
What do you think are the main tasks for a Project Co-ordinator / PMO Analyst / Project Admin and Why? Interviewers are looking for keywords in your answers too (competency based interviews)
Tell me how you would deal with a PM who constantly misses the deadline in sending reports to you? A classic question and you should be banking on one coming up like it
Which elements of the project co-ordination do you enjoy the most / the least? Again a question that often comes up and you need to have an answer ready including turning the negative into a positive
You're asked to prepare a document that outlines a process that you're not familiar with, how would you handle this request? Looking for some of the softer skills a project support possesses when dealing with unknown territory
What activities and tasks are expected to be completed by a Project Co-ordinator in the area of planning / risks / issues / reporting etc? How well can you describe the role you perform, interviewers are looking at the depth of your knowledge
What level of expertise would you say you were using MS Project? Not just looking for a expert / intermediate answer here - give examples of where and how you have used it
When asked by friends and family about your career - how do you describe what you do? A fun question that most project support people have faced at some point in their life.. yeah just what is it that you do!?
In a project you've supported what did you learn in terms of the management of the project? This question is almost certainly about your understanding of the whole project framework and how project delivery does try to hit pre-determined costs, time and scope
Tell me about something new you've learnt in project support recently? You do make sure you're constantly learning and challenging yourself don't you?

Project Manager Interviews - Soft Skills

Continuing our Project Manager interview series, in this issue we concentrate on the softer skills side of the Project Manager role and interview questions that may come up.

What mechanisms do you employ to enable you to cope with a heavy workload?
Can you give an example of when it has been difficult to maintain your own effectiveness due to external changes or pressures?
How did you manage the situation? Will you describe your decision making processes with reference to a particular decision you have made recently?
How do you manage the situation when your plan of work is upset by unforeseen circumstances?
What aspects of your leadership style might positively or negatively influence members of a team? Can you give me an example of each?
How do you make your opinion known when you disagree with the views of a colleague? How would you deal with a direct report who is failing to meet their objectives?
Can you give an example of where you have had to direct work through colleagues who were reluctant to participate? How did you deal with the situation?

we've decided find out in the next issue if its just about impressing your potential employer and why clients like to see candidates with PRINCE2 and ISEB qualifications

The next PPSO event

The Programme and Project Support Office Special Interest Group event publicised in the last newsletter went ahead with some interesting talks and discussions around "Centres of Excellence in PPSO" by both David Marsh and Neil Glover from the Office of Government Commerce.

It was also a great place to meet other like minded professionals and discuss topics such as: How do you generate a perception of value for your PPSO? and What are some quantitative or qualitative measures of success for the PPSO? , during the breakout sessions

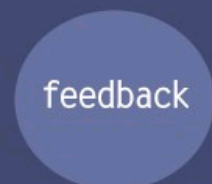
Interested in coming along to the next event? Put the 30th or 31st March in your diary now - more details nearer the time

tip-offs

Did you know about the Successful Delivery Kit available at the OGC site - visit today

You can even order the Kit on CD and receive regular updates - order today

Definitely a good information set to have



we would really appreciate your feedback

Get the Agency to Come to You

If you are in the market for a new permanent or contract role and are looking for different and diverse ways to find your next role, here is something that could get the agencies coming to you.

Have you thought about putting your CV into cyberspace? That's right, putting your CV on the internet is just one more way to market yourself effectively and more and more job seekers are doing it.

With small website hosting available free and even, no need to buy a domain name, there are few barriers to getting your experience, skills and c.v broadcasted out there. In a recent communication to Recruitment Agencies across the UK, a web-savvy, well informed recruitment consultant shared his secrets of finding candidates direct on the web - easy if you're a Boolean keyword searcher on the web.

Here are some of keywords to try out yourself and see if there are some of your peers already out there grabbing the limelight. You need an advanced search engine facility: <http://www.altavista.com/web/adv> to get started.

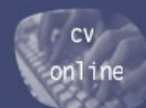
In the Boolean expression box try these (url:cv OR url:vitae OR url:resume) AND (co-ordinator OR pmo OR project office) AND PRINCE.

Find the Boolean expression help menu here: http://www.altavista.com/help/adv_search/syntax to help you understand the expressions.

So these people could be receiving information on new roles that are applicable to them - without the hassle of continuously searching boards, scouring newspapers and applying to individual agencies - all for the price of a little web knowledge and time in keeping your CV updated and before you!

Free website hosting can be found at places like Freeserve (<http://www.freeserve.com/sitebuilder/mysite.htm>) an excellent free tool that is easy to use and instant. Alternatively, try your own internet access company like AOL, Tiscali, and LineOne etc for your own personal webspace that often comes with your account.

For layouts and the way to present your cv - just try the above search and take a leaf out of someone else's book and don't reinvent the wheel. One thing you must make sure you do is update your c.v regularly!!



another way to market yourself



ARRASPEOPLE®

This newsletter is brought to you by Arras People - the Project Management and Project Support Recruitment Specialists. Since our last newsletter we've continue to expand and gain new clients - October, November and December being our busiest months to date. We've also opened our Southern based office in Bedfordshire (southern@arraspeople.co.uk) to compliment our northern office (northern@arraspeople.co.uk).

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Previous newsletters are now available on the website - if you missed or lost the previous version