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December 2004 Issue 10



Welcome to the 10th issue of Project Management Tip-Offs. In the last year we've grown tremendously and the readership currently stands at 2000 project management professionals. In the New Year we officially launch our targeted newsletter (Projections) to our clients, both hirers of Project Management staff (HR professionals) and people who are current line managers of project management staff. See the site at: www.arraspeople.co.uk/projections. To contribute to either newsletter please get in touch with us and watch this space for other opportunities to market yourself directly to hirers of project management staff.

Calling all project support professionals, enter the [survey today](#) and win a mystery prize

For any feedback or comments please get in touch at:

tipoffs@projectmanagementnewsletter.co.uk

Get the previous editions at: Project Management Tip-Offs [Click Here](#)

I'm Creative.... Get Me Out of Here

By John Gough, Diabolo

At work we now spend on average over 2.2 hours each day reading and responding to emails, and we attend an average of 559 meetings each year. So is there time for anything else?

Time spent on emails and meetings takes us more and more away from thinking about what we are doing, how we are doing it and how we could do it differently. Creative thinking and innovation are losing out to mediocrity, which is a shame, because in a survey of 1000 people (commissioned by the East of England Development Agency) 70% of us described ourselves as ideas people.

Being bogged down with the day to day grind and all those emails and meetings is stifling even the most creative talents. The survey showed that only 11% of people in Great Britain have their best ideas while at work. More people (30%) it seems have their best ideas whilst drifting off to sleep.

So how many, or indeed how few ideas do we remember and bring back into the workplace? What is the effect on innovation which is so vital if organisations are to grow, adapt and change? What mechanisms do organisations have for generating and harnessing ingenuity? How can they capture creativity? How do they incubate ideas?

Professor Richard Wiseman, from the University of Hertfordshire, and Britain's only Chair in the understanding of psychology, was adamant: "These results illustrate how our minds are often most creative when we relax and take time away from everyday pressures. Ideas can come to people at any time and in any place, but to fully reap the rewards of a creative mind, people's brains need to be primed for a new way of thinking. Britain's bosses must therefore foster new approaches if they want to get the most out of their employees."

Organisations need to get away from the day to day if they are to encourage innovation:

- If a day away from the office is well structured and facilitated it can generate new thinking and new ideas.
- If the day away from the office includes new stimulus, such as poetry, music or sculpture, it can lead to different original thinking.
- If there is 'off the wall' and 'wacky' content, it can develop new thinking patterns. Two 'wacky' ideas when combined can create a third which works.
- Play back the 'as is' as though it were a film or play to allow people to explore possibilities. Incremental changes can be as effective as new ideas. Every problem that has ever been solved can be solved again in a different way.
- Think through the assumptions being made about how things should be done. Which are really true?
- Don't just capture the ideas on the day, review the event, more ideas will have emerged, even if they did occur when drifting off to sleep.

The people who do the day to day, know how it can improve and evolve. Let them step outside themselves for a day or two. What is frightening is how much they know that can change. Unleash the creativity and reap the rewards of that bush tucker trial.

About Diabolo

[Diabolo](#) promotes an innovative dynamic approach enabling change in organisations by connecting hard-headed business skills with the human spirit and values. Combining our collective knowledge and experience, we have created some powerful frameworks for business thinking. We call these Diabolo Journeys. We use a highly visual technique to guide clients through complex processes with clarity of thought. By combining tried and tested coaching and consulting practice with graphics, we have developed a suite of

10 Steps of Project Management

Mistake #No.2

Following on from our last publication we discussed the need to bring in a 3rd party supplier to determine your requirements. This is tip number 2 from the little book of project mistakes and looks at what initially may seem a subtle difference but is huge if you end up relying on the contract to resolve performance problems.

When you ask a vendor to help you build a Website that's capable of growing to 1,500,000 users, you're asking them to use their specialist know how to anticipate and eliminate potential technical problems.

If you ask them to provide a Web server that can manage 45,000,000 hits a day with 98% reliability, you're just giving them a shopping list to fill.

This might seem like semantics but this kind of detail is critical to contracts. Follow the first approach and you are contractually protected against many unexpected technical hiccups. The second approach? Well, if that server's not powerful enough, it's not the vendor who's made the mistake...

In the first approach you are stating the business requirement and asking the 3rd party supplier to determine the technical requirements to handle that number of users. In the second you have supplied a technical requirement, "can manage 45,000,000 hits" and it probably can but not the type of hits you really had in mind. Therefore it is very likely you have ownership of the problem.

If you have any specific examples and learning you would like to share we will be pleased to publish them.

Adapted from the little book of project mistakes [Best Practice Group PLC](#)

John Gough is a Director of Diabolo

What's in a name?

By Chris Grey, Project Management Professional

Do you consider yourself to be a professional? Have you undergone Project Management training AND time served? Are you a member of a Project Management professional body with a code of ethics?

If, as you should, you have answered yes to those questions then I have another question for you.

Why do we allow people to use that title for positions/personnel who quite blatantly would have answered no to those questions?

I am a Project Management contractor so I scan the job market on a daily basis constantly looking for my next contract. On average in excess of 50% of the adverts I see for Project Manager are in fact for something else.

One advert recently went through all the 'book speak' descriptions of a Project Management role and finished with ONE essential which was that the applicant must be a chartered accountant. Another, today, started with "Development Project Manager. Skills and Experience: Mandatory: At least two years solid C (this is vital as the initial development work you will undertake will be in C, on going work will be Java or C++ biased)."

Now I freely accept that there may be a Project Manager who is a chartered accountant and there are probably many who are proficient in C. But neither position is actually looking for a Project Manager. They are looking for people who are something else but who COULD carry out a project management role too (note the lack of capitalisation).

It is YOUR professional title that these people are using: it is YOUR profession that will get the blame when it all goes south. This misuse of the title MUST stop. Or perhaps we should start using Dr. as our title. After all it is only an indication of professional status, who cares if it is valid.

"Chris Grey is a versatile Project Management professional with in excess of eight years experience combined with a proven track record in the successful completion of projects relating to IT, business process re-design, software design/development and turnkey deployment of software solutions. He is dedicated to promoting Project Management through the provision of solutions based on formal methodologies combined with mentoring of existing staff".

If you would like to contact Chris about the article please get in touch: jpoffs@projectmanagementnewsletter.co.uk



Practical Tip-Off: Introduction to VBA

By Mick Mason - Business Support, Arras People

OK, VBA or Visual Basic for Applications is just that. A Visual Basic language designed for us poorer folk that haven't got the cash or inclination for VB. Also, there are times when you want to customise an application, create custom actions on user events or simply make a slicker application or even hide your code so a user can't break it. Well, they might...?

Something simple to start: a message box. A user opens an Excel template, you need to prompt them to remind them to save it in a particular area of the network. Or maybe you simply want to wish them a good day, or perhaps you need to tell them the current date and time...

Open a new Excel workbook and save it as a template file, it can contain anything or nothing. Keep the file open and then follow the steps below:

1. Hold down the ALT key and press F11. This will open the VB editor. As you are on worksheet one it will select this worksheet in the project window.
2. Double click the "ThisWorkbook" icon in the project window
3. Select the dropdown menu that says "General" and select "Workbook". A new sub routine will be created and should be called "Private Sub Workbook_Open()"
4. In the line immediately below this type in the following: MsgBox ("Hi. Please Remember To Save to:...", (vbOKOnly), ("Sample Dialog Box"))
5. Now save and close the file.
6. Open it back up, if you are prompted to enable macros select "Yes" and the dialog box should appear.

There are 2 ways to cancel out this dialog:

1. Create a custom Digital Certificate
2. Lower the security settings

One of my favourite uses for VBA was user tracking but I have also used it for embedding formula and locking cells or even hiding worksheets so that they do not appear even on the menu. Other uses might include automatically opening all linked workbooks prior to opening the current workbook so all linked formulae automatically update or even creating local copies of files at predetermined periods so you can always ensure a file is backed up.



New Book - Project Management Roles and Responsibilities

A new book released by the Center for Business Practices (R) (CBP), the research arm of project management consultancy PM Solutions, focuses on the competencies of project personnel that companies should establish, retain, and encourage when seeking to maximize their chances for project success.

Project Management Roles and Responsibilities provides comprehensive descriptions of the responsibilities, skills, and desired backgrounds for project personnel to guide organization leaders in crafting job descriptions that are appropriate for their organization, or to rethink the ways in which they have assigned responsibilities to existing positions. Positions described in this book include:

- Project Portfolio Manager
- Strategic Project Office Director
- Manager of Project Support
- Manager of Project Managers
- Project Management Mentor
- Program Manager
- Project Manager
- Project Team Leader
- Project Support Team Member
- Project Controller
- Project Planner
- Project Scheduler
- Project Estimator
- Risk Management Coordinator

For those of you who use MS Access I'll cover a little VBA for the particular application in coming editions and will also look at RDBMS normalisation, structure and navigation.

Further reading:

[Creating Gantt Charts in Excel](#)

[Workbook Object Protection](#)

Mick can be contacted at: business_support@arraspeople.co.uk

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[Survey - exploring the role of project co-ordinator and project support - take part today!](#)

Employment A-Z: D = Drunkenness

By John Stamford



As the Christmas Party time approaches, there will be many solicitors and employment lawyers rubbing their hands with glee, because Christmas party time and employees represent good business with many potential claims.

It is a sad fact that a small number of office employees regard Christmas parties and other work social functions as an excuse to exercise behaviour and conduct which at other times of the years of the year they would not condone.

A function or gathering undertaken in the name of the company or organization even though it is usually outside normal working hours is subject to Employment law and the jurisdiction of Employment Tribunals and the employer is usually responsible although individuals who discriminate can be sued personally. Frequently it is the demon drink which takes over but not always and this results in claims of Harassment or sex or race discrimination, or violence.

A number of my own cases come readily to mind. The first one was a company Christmas function. The drinks were flowing liberally and there were a number of people in this particular grouping. The next morning one of the ladies in the group formally made a complaint of sexual misconduct against one of the males in the group. The allegation was taken with the utmost seriousness and an independent investigator was appointed. The woman was adamant that the man did it, the man said he was so drunk that he did not know whether he had or had not done it. All the rest of the members of the group without exception, including the woman's mother said they had not seen anything happen. The woman went off sick with stress and depression and subsequently logged and Employment Tribunal Complaint against the employer and the man individually. We did ultimately resolve this situation by talking with both parties and putting them in jobs where they would not meet, but it was a close run thing.

At another event was a prestigious Christmas dinner dance graced by a company chairman no less. When the guests were awaiting their carriages at 1pm, two lady employees, who were rather under the influence of the evenings free drinks suddenly decided that they did not like one another and started a fight ripping off the opponents evening dresses, so not only was it a sight to be seen, it was also an embarrassment for all the assembled company and rather spoil the evening. In the sober light of the next day both ladies were suspended and a full investigation was undertaken and at the Disciplinary Hearing three days later both ladies were dismissed.

At another company Christmas party the employer had provided a free bar (I do not generally advise this because there are always a few employees who will drink in excess just because it is free) These two Senior Managers both with over ten years service each, started an argument as to who supported the best football team, Man U or Arsenal, tempers became frayed and before long there were fisty cuffs which sent tables and glasses flying all over the place. Again this one resulted in the two individuals loosing their jobs.

As the employer you need to have a senior person responsible for the organisation and running of the social event and whom can take action if matters appear to be getting out of hand. What sort of matters? It may be he sees employees committing illegal acts such as taking drugs.

Harassment is always a potential problem. Harassment occurs when there is unwanted conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating the victims dignity and creating an intimidatory, hostile or degrading, humiliating or offensive environment and it is the VICTIM who decides it is harassment! Whilst in the main, it men who harass women, frequently women harass men, so it's not all one way. Since last December, discrimination or harassment on the ground of sexual orientation and religion and belief have been law so you should have updated your equal opportunities policy. When deciding the date of your Christmas even do ensure that it does not preclude some staff members because it is a special day for their religion.

Another potential problem area is Christmas lunches. As Christmas approaches employees lunch hours become longer and longer. When there is urgent correspondence or deliveries to get out this can be a serious problem, particularly when drinks have been plentiful. So the best approach is to agree which day you have the Christmas luncheon and agree the time period of the Departments close down. You should state that all other days the normal lunch hours apply and if any employees transgress they will be subject to the disciplinary procedure.

Perhaps the best advice is that if your Manager organizing any social event sees anything which offends normal decency, it is better to stop it then and

Arras will be reviewing the book in the next edition of tip-offs.

[> View](#)



Keys to keeping projects on track

[Article from silicon.com](#)

"When it comes to project management, what separates the wheat from the chaff? A healthy balance between formal methodology and hard-earned experience, says Stewart Baines."

Article goes on to look at the different methodologies in use.



Keep up the work during the holidays!

Did you know that December can often be the less competitive time for job hunting than any other time of the year?

Many people decide to put their feet up at this time of year and give themselves a job-hunting break but many organisations are still thinking about gearing themselves up to a new year (and in some cases a new financial year!)

So where does that leave you?

Carry on applying, brushing up on your interviewing techniques and be the first in the queue for New Year opportunities.



General hints and tips for interviews

Interviews vary tremendously, from the very informal to formal. However, some questions can be anticipated, as can the subject matter. If you are well prepared, then the majority of problem questions should not arise.

You will know about the company, you will know about yourself and you will have a good idea of the demands of the job - these questions will not be a problem to the well prepared interviewee.

A few general rules:
Speak up when answering questions.

there. Far from being a kill joy, just normal good management, allows the majority of employees to enjoy your generous hospitality during the festive season.

John Stamford & Associates Ltd is a Personnel, Training and Employment Relations Consultancy - www.johnstamfordassociates.com

New Roles from Arras People

For all our current live vacancies see the website at www.arraspeople.co.uk/jobs.php

Hot Jobs! We have a number of on-going recruitment campaigns for a number of clients:

- **Management consultancy** - looking for a number of roles from Programme Directors, Project Managers, Project Support Officers - if you have consultancy org experience, public sector projects and programmes, security clearance. Permanent roles
- **Healthcare Sector** - again looking for a variety of roles from Project Manager to PMO and planners - contract roles
- **Systems Implementation / Consultancy** - Project Management and Support roles. Permanent roles
- **Project Co-ordinator (Specialist role)**- Experienced project co-ordinator to work within a pmo - specialised in the initiation stages of IT projects
- **Development Project Manager**- required for specialist software organisation
- **Project Manager roles**- required for public sector organisation tasked with ensuring standards in project management in public sector projects

Project Management Careers Clinic Timings for Dec 2004 - Jan 2005

Career clinic timings over the coming month:

Project Managers - 12/01/05

Project Support / Project Office - 11/01/05

Programme Managers/Executives - 21/12/04

> [Book now](#)

Recent feedback - From a candidate wanting to discuss "testing my expectations of my market value" - Recommendation to others to use the service "**Absolutely - the session matched my expectations completely, and the format was practical.**"

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About Arras People:

Latest update from Arras People - the project management and project office recruitment specialists.

Happy Holidays and Wishing All Our Readers a Prosperous New Year

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"Be nice to nerds. Chances are you'll end up working for one." Bill Gates

Answer briefly, but try to avoid yes or no answers.

Don't worry about pausing before you answer, it shows you can think and are not spitting out the sound bites you learned!

Don't worry about admitting you don't know - but keep this to a bare minimum.

Don't embellish answers or lie! Be as honest as possible.

Be prepared for hypothetical situation questions, take your time on these.

Be prepared for the unexpected question, that's designed to see how you cope with the unexpected.

If you ask questions keep them brief during the interview, remember you're the interviewee.

At the end of the interview ask your questions in an open manner, that is questions which cannot be answered yes or no. E.g. tell me about....? what is....? why.....?

Thank the interviewers for their time when you leave quietly and calmly, and smile, even if you now hate them! :)



Arras Corner

From project management recruitment to Christmas Markets

Hot chestnuts and mulled wine, carol singing and an old-fashioned carousel, and Santa Claus abseiling down the ancient belfry - the Christmas Market in Arras is an absolute 'must' this year.

Taken from Eurotunnel

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