

www.arraspeople.co.uk

Welcome

Welcome to all our readers! In this issue we take a look inside the Arras People Survey 2008, and examine specific work-life balance issues that indirectly address just what it takes to get ahead in the field of project management. While opportunities abound to progress and improve your station in life, sacrifices will probably have to be made. The question remains: What are you willing to do to get ahead?

Also in this issue, we'll take a look behind the scenes in the lives of anonymous project management professionals, and whether they truly want a lifestyle that emphasizes 'working to live', or 'living to work'. Addressing workplace issues such as gender, commuting time, mode of transport, working from home and age, PM Tipoffs finds out more about today's project management professional FROM today's project management professional. In addition, we meet new members of the Arras People family, and offer you the chance to sound off about your thoughts and findings about the project management experience at our own blog, [How to Manage a Camel](#).

Want to contribute to a future issue of Tipoffs? Drop us a line at editor@arraspeople.co.uk.

Work-Life Balance: Heaven or Hell?

By *Mick Hides*

Work life balance is a term that is gaining in prominence, and for once is a UK-inspired philosophy which was only adopted by the USA a decade or so later. The meaning of Work-life balance is different for everyone but in general addresses the *"unhealthy life choices that many people were making; they were choosing to neglect other important area of their lives such as family, friends, and hobbies in favor of work-related chores and goals"* [1]



This has been reduced to the more well-known tome: *"working to live, not living to work"*.

The UK government formalised this thinking into *'flexible working'*, a phrase that describes any working pattern adapted to suit your needs. Common types of flexible working are:

- part-time: working less than the normal hours, perhaps by working fewer days per week
- flexi-time: choosing when to work (there's usually a core period during which you have to work)
- annualised hours: your hours are worked out over a year (often set shifts with you deciding when to work the other hours)
- compressed hours: working your agreed hours over fewer days
- staggered hours: different starting, break and finishing times for employees in the same workplace
- job sharing: sharing a job designed for one person with someone else
- home working: working from home

You can combine any of these working patterns to come up with something to suit your circumstances. [2]

The rights of employees to basic rights regarding work-life balance are enshrined in law across the European Union. Working time directives, paternity leave, parental rights, and caring for

In This Issue...

[Work-Life Balance: Heaven or Hell?](#)

[Working to live?](#)

[In sickness or in wealth?](#)

[Balance or attitude?](#)

[Trying to be happy with achieving both](#)

[Suggested readings and links](#)

[Arras People Update](#)

[Project Management Blog](#)

[New roles](#)

Join our FREE Email Mailing List

Privacy by SafeSubscribeSM
For Email Newsletters you can trust

Arras People

[About Arras People](#)
[Newsletter Archive](#)
[Register with us](#)
[News and Events](#)

New roles at Arras People

hot jobs

[Visit the Job Board for more vacancies](#)

"Heaven or Hell?" links

Wikipedia article that addresses Work-Life Balance can be found [here](#).

A Direct.gov web page that addresses flexible working opportunities can be found [here](#).

dependents have all become accepted cases for controlling work life balance.

Employers are more aware today that a healthy and happy work force is more productive and more likely to continue producing for them. More money either in overtime, bonus or base salary is losing its appeal to many people who recognise that money isn't everything; perhaps that is why the public sector have a greater holiday allowance than anyone else.

The reality for Project professionals is that they are constantly driven by deadlines and often tomorrow *will not do*. We have all worked on projects when the right thing to do is to work excessive hours. But how many of us have considered the alternatives. Why are we working such long hours? Is our plan unrealistic? Do we have sufficient resources? If you are not able to change any of these are you really empowered to manage the project?

One simple way to gain back control is working from home. Free from the constantly ringing telephone and other office related distractions, you can concentrate on the things that matter within your project. From personal experience, I know that I can achieve significantly more, than if I were in the office. If this is not appropriate, what about getting in slightly earlier and using the quiet time in the same way? I have recently caught up with a public sector manager who has a flexible working arrangement. He manages a portfolio of projects and has a high record of achievement. He has designed his day to start at 7am and he often ends up finishing by 3pm or 4pm, allowing him time for MBA self-study and quality family experiences each day. This may not work for everyone, though, and even he admits that occasionally longer days are required.

The truth is that as Project Managers, we are probably the best equipped professionals to design a work-life balance that is both productive for our employers and allows us to have a lifestyle outside of the office. The decision as to whether you make the changes is your choice. I was taught early on in my career about reasons and excuses. From the perspective of work-life balance, you need to determine whether there are reasons or excuses for you not making the right choice.

Mick Hides is a Consultant for Arras People.

SOURCES:

[1] [Work-life balance, Wikipedia article](#), Accessed 24th April 2008

[2] [Flexible working and work-life balance: an introduction, Direct.gov article](#), Accessed 24th April 2008

Working to live?

By Nicola Thorp

Maintaining a work/life balance is becoming increasingly difficult today with pressure from employers requiring more productivity for less money. This is an ever increasing trend throughout the UK with the pressure of looming outsourcing solutions becoming the norm across all sectors. However, this is not always the key reason behind professionals working longer hours.



The Arras 2008 survey revealed an astounding level of resource issues affecting a healthy work/life balance; "I am working unhealthily long hours due to a lack of resources - no matter how many times I raise this (and projects have suffered - although not failed in the past) I have been unsuccessful at getting the right resource fully committed" - this type of complaint is echoed throughout the survey, which prompts the question: Who is actually managing the project? Lack of authority in managing resource allocation within projects is an increasing trend according to the survey.

"Working to Live?" links

The 2008 Arras People survey is available online just by clicking [here](#).

Our [press release](#) (Word version [here](#)) and the [summary](#) of the report can both be downloaded as well (Adobe Acrobat is required to view the PDF files)

"Sickness or in wealth" links

Commuting is another bone of contention for professionals according to the survey - with comments such as: "Commuting does not leave any time for life during the week and am too tired at weekends". Often the location of our employers is not convenient to where we live - it would be easy to say "relocate or find a new role", but how feasible is this in reality? We have commitments such as children in schools, or a partner's work location to take into consideration, plus the obvious answer, "Why should I move - I like it where I am".

All of these factors would push us toward taking a role closer to home, which is not always an option - other comments by candidates from the survey are, such as; "I spend too much time commuting from my office. There is absolutely no reason why I cannot work where the action is using a laptop and mobile phone". I have to agree that at times it has been far more beneficial to work away from the office either at home or on site for a number of reasons such as: promoting a presence to the project teams, peace and quiet to be able to catch up on paperwork etc and of course more time to actually get on with the task in hand without adding unnecessary delays/interruptions.

The list of reasons why the work/life balance is not working is predominantly based around the two issues discussed. However, other factors have been recorded, all of which are available online at the Arras People [website](#). Whilst our survey has highlighted a number of issues focused on a negative live to work vs. work to live experience for project professionals, we also have some success stories. In these instances the issues were addressed by the employers, resulting in better working hours and more flexibility for working remotely.

In essence, deprived "me time" can lead to health problems, poor or failing relationships and a lack of social life; all work and no play really does make Jack a dull boy. It is time to empower ourselves - take a hold of the situation and weigh up the pros and cons. Analysing your needs against your employers needs and making them aware of your situation may be all that is required to change to a happier, healthier and more productive you!

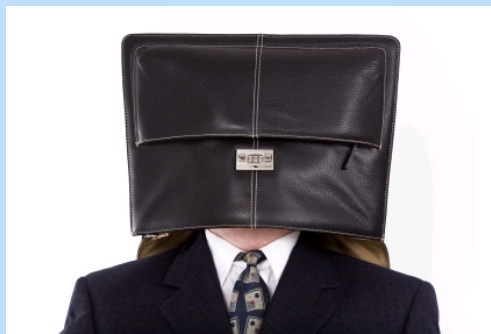
Nicola Thorp is a Consultant for Arras People.

For more on the views and issues of both Lindsay Scott and other project management professionals, click [here](#).

In sickness or in wealth?

By Lindsay Scott

When talking about work/life balance amongst colleagues recently, we started thinking about the ultimate sacrifice we would have been willing to make in relation to our own project management careers. Miss the odd holiday (or not even book one for a few years), be prepared to travel 100 miles a day to get there, not be at home all week for a month or two maybe - all seemed perfectly acceptable - to us anyway!



For some, it seems that the ultimate sacrifice has been with their health. Obviously for many, this hasn't been a conscious decision. There haven't been cries of "I must delivery this project even though my leg is hanging off and my fingers are just bloody stumps from the constant changes in the plan!" More like its crept up on them when they were least expecting it. Through my career I've seen two types of health meltdowns in the project management field - at the peak of the project, and in the aftermath of it.

At the peak of the project, the project manager suffered stress at an unbelievable level, and the underlying reasons for the stress in the first place are actually the most common in projects and also reflected in our recent survey by other project managers. Common comments have included; "lack of resources", "lack of commitment in resources", "lack of support at senior management level", "client

is a ballbreaker", "we should never have started this project, it was never going to succeed", "legal implications", etc. etc. Something looks familiar with this list. These are things we constantly see in the world of project management, all of them legitimate reasons why projects fail. This list doesn't look like it'll change anytime soon.

Back to the project manager who suffered at the peak of the project - what happened? The strange thing about stress is the way that one day everything is manageable, you're dealing with things and are in control, but the next day it just becomes unmanageable. 'He just stopped functioning', 'there was nothing else he could do', 'no longer managing and controlling the project', 'he was no longer doing his job'. Talking to him many months later, he described what he thought had happened to himself - how one minute this is what he thrived on, the adrenalin, the deadline, getting his team performing, even dealing with the ballbreaker client! Sure he was drinking and smoking more, eating a bar of chocolate a day and not much else, sleeping when he could grab a few hours, but hey, that's what he signed up for when he took the job - the kudos, the wealth all pretty much more important in the grand scheme of things than his health.

So when you've managed to come through a particular nightmare project unscathed with your mental faculties and physical health intact, why is it that the aftermath is waiting for you - ready to bring you to your knees with a period of colds, flu and any other autoimmune disorders? The adrenalin is gone, you actually have time to spend with friends and family, or even take a holiday. But it's going to take at least two weeks to build your strength back up and learn to relax again.

The role of project manager is always going to have its periods of stress - that goes with the territory of managing and lets face it most PM's get paid well for it but a comment from the last survey really made me think about the subject of health, the role of project manager and their team; "After a very serious illness a few years ago brought on by work-related stress I have changed my attitude to work and **also to employers**". Does the project manager also have a responsibility to their own team - knowing what to look for in their team - the early stages of stress etc? Or is that too nanny state?

Ultimately, what you're prepared to sacrifice comes down to your own individual circumstances, personality and attitudes to life. For some that will always mean taking it to the Gordon "Lunch is for wimps" Gekko-extremes.

Lindsay Scott blogs about Project Management issues [here](#).

Work/life balance or attitude? Trying to be happy with achieving both

By Dr. Keith Tanner - Frameworks Learning and Development Ltd.

For most of us, the idea of work/life balance will conjure up 'ideals', 'dreams', and maybe 'fantasies'. Realistically, however, the balance is often one

of compromise. Having worked in the public sector, private sector and third sector, I've often moved between jobs due to the fact that my life ambitions have been difficult to realise with the roles I've fulfilled.



I remember my first trainee manager post, back in the days before mobiles and 24/7 access. It paid well and I could afford my hobby - playing in a rock band! Yet I found the commuting tiresome and the job dull, and decided to leave for something more local and linked to the music business. At my exit interview, I still recall the smirk on my manager's face when I stated that I was off to explore my 'artistic side'. The job came with less money but great opportunities to develop the band. For a while, the compromise was

"Trying to be happy" links

For more information on Frameworks Learning and Development Ltd., click [here](#)

Join our FREE 
Email Mailing List

Privacy by  SafeSubscribeSM
For Email Newsletters you can trust

successful. Work was fun and the band started to do well. Then it hit. The band split, the work became more exacting, and I realised without my goal, work was, for the most part, pointless. That was until I met someone in a pub in 1987.

He was a Swede, staying in London with John McGeogh, then the guitarist for Siouxsie and the Banshees. We spent two days together, sampling the delights of Kent, and talking. And something happened over those two days that changed my life. We talked about my wants for work/life balance, satisfaction, happiness, and achievements. The Swede had a philosophy I'd never experienced. 'Learn to be happy with both', he said. Work out what truly inspires you, what fuels you, what drives you. Decide on your real goals, and why you want them, then 'f' them - that is, see if they fit your financial wants, your friends and families requirements, fortunes you have in mind (physical, emotional, mental, spiritual), fitness you desire, fun and freedoms you want, in fact any 'f' you can 'fink' of. And then the Swede said in his sage way, "learn to love what you do, whatever it is and maybe later you can do what you love."

From this, I decided what I really wanted to do was to learn and to teach. The two were mutually inclusive for me. Learning as it inspires me, teaching others as it rewards me. So I planned to go to university. I learnt a great deal about a range of subjects, and more about me. I began teaching at a university, then a college, now as a private trainer. I've worked in many different businesses, supported people from all walks of life and managed to even marry something of my hobby, music, with my work teaching others song writing and performance skills.

Still to this day I continue to learn, and if I was drinking in London in the mid-1980s, you can take a guess at how old I am. Recently, I finished my NLP Practitioner and Master Practitioner courses, and now I'm completing my MBA whilst working across the UK delivering training courses for a range of clients, and enjoying almost every minute. Almost I say, as I've also realised that there will be some issues, some problems, maybe even some people that no matter how hard you work at it, the compromise may be more in their favour than yours. If that is ever the case, walk away, don't waste energy, focus on your goals again, and find another way to get there. It's as important to know what you don't want, as well as truly believe in what it is you do want.

The compromise is healthy, the balance happy. So whatever it is you do, find ways of enjoying, if not loving, what it is you do. Even if it means changing your goals and changing your world to suit who you are and who you want to be, and not what others want you to become.

Dr Keith Tanner is an internationally published award winning author who specialises in technical writing, fund-raising and developing innovative learning and training development projects for business and community groups. You can find out more at <http://www.fladl.co.uk>.

Suggested readings and links

Edited by Dan Strayer

With each issue of Tipoffs, we endeavour to find some web sites and relevant books for your perusal and study with the month's theme. With work-life balance as the theme this month, we point you to three books and several web sites that can point you in the the right direction for getting the balance the way you want it to go.

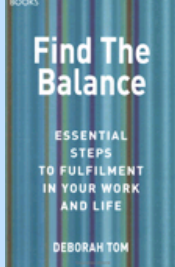
TIPOFFS' BOOKS OF THE MONTH



**[The Balancing Act](#)
Fiona Parashar**

What reviewers are saying:

"...strike(s) a balance within the practical and the informative aspects of work and life, cleverly discussed in this book... You are left with a very positive feeling." - 'janemolli', (5 stars at www.amazon.co.uk)



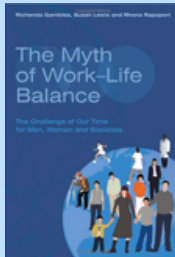
[Find the Balance](#)

Deborah Tom

What reviewers are saying:

"Deborah Tom's book shows us what we are missing and how to go about achieving it." - Sir

John Harvey-Jones



[The Myth of Work-Life Balance](#)

Richenda Gambles, Suzan Lewis and Rhona Rapoport

What reviewers are saying:

"...policy-makers, students and trade unionists...will find original material and ideas in this book." - **People Management, May 2006**

TIPOFFS' LINKS OF THE MONTH

[UNISON](#) - This public sector-focussed union for Britain and Europe is a national campaigner on the march toward balance in the working professional's life. Essential reading is everywhere, including the importance of taking a holiday and implementing flexitime as a way to advance your career.

[Employers for work-life balance](#) - This site is more of an all-encompassing approach, inclusive of all sections of those affected by the decisions made to address a solid W-LB. It targets both large and small to medium organisations, and provides links to case studies, up-to-date research and legislation on the topic.

[Direct.gov page for flexible working & work-life balance](#) - This set of government webpages gives everyone the lowdown on a newer way to achieve work-life balance while maintaining many of the hours and responsibilities of a working period. Answers questions on matters such as parental leave, new working patterns and statutory rights.

Arras People Update

Arras People welcomes Gary Holmes and Dan Strayer to the team.

Gary started with Arras in March and has worked as a Programme Support Analyst for a Manchester-based insurance company. Gary is currently a Recruitment Consultant, and has passed the APM's Introduction to Project Management course.

Dan started with Arras in March and brings a wealth of media knowledge and experience, with special expertise in writing, research and internet relations. He joins Arras as a Research/Marketing Officer.

In other news...

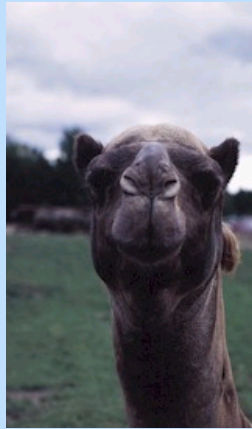
- Arras People kicks off May with a host of new client contracts and repeat business from our existing clients. Check out the [job board](#) and register to be informed of new opportunities.
- If you live in the North West area and are thinking about a career change, consider joining us. We have many opportunities in the North West area, and we are always here to help the career changer or project management professional looking to take the next step. For more details, go to [Careers at Arras](#).
- Last year, Arras People raised over £1000 for three North West charities through our [project management careers clinics](#). The efforts of both our candidates and us led to one memorable cheque presentation and a day out of the office (not to mention a little bit of [press coverage](#)) at Three Owls Bird Sanctuary in Norden.
- It's never too late to brush up on your training and skills. If you need advice on your project management career with the added bonus of contributing to one of four newly selected charities, then [book a slot](#) at one of our clinics today.
- We've recently published a [Qualifications Brochure](#) (Adobe

Acrobat required to download) for project managers. You can also get some of your questions about Project Management answered [here](#).

Project Management Blog

How to Manage a Camel

The comments are piling in, and traffic is growing steadily. The blog we at Arras People created is an online gathering spot for professionals in project management. It is a place for project managers to address issues in this growing sector. We are raising questions and concerns about the field, and it is our hope to continue that trend. But we need something else. All that is is a little bit of your experience, knowledge and, yes, the odd rant here or there!



Drop by How to Manage a Camel today, and add your comments to existing posts, or simply let us know about your thoughts on the issues surrounding the work-life dynamic for project managers. You are always welcome at the Camel!

> [Visit the blog](#)