**The Conflict Between me and the Job Market**

**Introduction**

From early last August up to mid-January, I found myself one of the involuntary unemployed.

Why I was unemployed for so long is a bone of contention between me and the recruitment world.

When I left my previous employer I was confident I would secure a position within 2 or three weeks.

After all, I am a project manager with the Project Management Institute’s PMP certification which is recognised worldwide. I have 15 years experience in the profession, mainly in IT. Prior to pursuing a career in project management, I have had careers in accounting and IT applications consulting supported by formal qualifications.

I keep my project management knowledge up to date by attending international conferences; the most recent was in Vancouver last October. I read the professional journals, read extensively on the internet and have written a number of published articles.

I have been actively involved in my Professional Association providing educational and other opportunities to the membership, having recently retired from the Board of the Sydney Chapter after almost 7 years, the past two years of which I was Vice President.

**Why So Long?**

During my unemployed period I estimate I would have applied for over 400 project management jobs, sitting at my computer for the full working day applying for up to 10 jobs a day, following up on these applications and attending interviews.

So why did it take me so long to secure a position?

Was it that my job searching strategy ineffective? Maybe my resume and other application material were not up to scratch. What about my interview presence and responses?

I am 63 years old. My resume does not divulge my age. However it is difficult to know if interviewers form subconscious prejudices when presented with my physical presence. Although age discrimination is illegal, it is surprising how many litigate ways prospective employers can determine a candidate’s age. I am however working on the basis that the time taken to secure a position was not related to my age.

Another possible reason for my predicament was the state of the job market. I wasn’t alone. Many of my professional colleagues and contacts in other professions were finding things just as tough as I was.

When all come to all, I believe the primary reason for my predicament is the difference between what I consider to the attributes and skills of a project manager and those dictated by the prospective employers.

**Attributes and Skills of a Project Manager**

The word 'manager' signifies the ability to accomplish desired goals and objectives through people and using available resources efficiently and effectively.

A project manager is a manager who applies the skills of management to a specific endeavour, a project or program of work.

Although employers and recruitment agencies mightn’t argue with this brief definition, there is a disconnection from the definition when it comes to formulating the selection criteria for advertised positions.

**Industry and Technical Knowledge Required**

The selection criteria for advertised IT and business process project management positions in almost all cases require industry, technical or product specialists to fulfil the roles.

For example, the advertisement might suggest that the candidate must have financial services experience, particularly in wealth management and be familiar with the changes in government regulations.

Another might be that the candidate must be a Knowledge Management expert with experience in Sharepoint, Documentum and Project Wise.

Remember how we defined management and bear in mind how the world project management professional bodies documents the skills and attributes of a project management role. Industry and product knowledge do not form part of the Standards.

For a construction project, is it valid to expect the project manager to have carpentry, electrical or plumbing skills?

Why this concentration for on industry and product skills for IT and business process project management positions?

Because the employer has a particular job to be done that requires certain technical skills and knowledge, and may involve more than one person. The employer surmises that, if a team member has both the required technical skills and, by the way, also has the ability and experience to oversee the management of that work, two roles can be rolled into one position.

That may be valid if the project is small and can’t justify a full time project manager.

**The Way Forward**

Organisations have got to realise that multiple project managers doubling up as product specialists, each looking after a confined and limited scope of work, is not the most appropriate way to manage the organisation’s work. These organisations need to realise that the work needs to be managed, not as isolated pieces of work, but as multiple components in a portfolio, with project managers managing multiple projects at the one time.

Let me ask you, if you were to employ someone to manage your technical projects, would you prefer to employ someone that has done the same thing over and over again for the past five years, or someone who has experienced a wide variety of roles interacting with a wide range of people with different skills.

I want to pause and reflect on how I approach the job market when my current contract ends. Although my arguments may have validity, I don’t believe I will change the world between now and then.

I have decided to be a realist. Just like when you want to sell your house, you may think it is worth $1.5m. If the market is only willing to pay $750k, that’s all it’s worth. Similarly in the case of a job, the job market will dictate what it wants and I will have to figure how I to respond accordingly.