



## Projects are about people

**Programme and Project Management practices contribute to the successful delivery of change across the NHS. A Portfolio, Programme and Project Management improvement initiative is being carried out within the NHS to help develop and promote skills, knowledge and experience in these areas.**

Suggest to James Woodhead that projects are about Gantt charts, critical path, and ticking off tasks and costs against a budget, and his response will illustrate his passion on the subject. For James, projects are about people. A project's goal is never an end in itself, and is only a success story from the perspective of the improvements it delivers.

James is a Strategic Partnership & Service Development Manager for health and social care in Leeds and has been a driving force in a number of NHS success stories in the region. In July 2008, his team won the Health and Social Care Award for their work on dignity and care for older people. He also led an initiative that achieved £4M of POPPs funding – 'Partnerships for Older People's Projects'.

### **Making things happen**

For James, the excitement of project management is that it is about 'making things happen'. "It's so easy to miss the real essence of project management by hiding behind terminology and methodologies," he

explains. "Projects are about implementing change, but you have to remember the people factors that sit behind that. For instance, organisations often need a degree of bravery and real confidence to embark on big changes. Effective communication with all the stakeholders involved is the key to this."

Stakeholder management is acknowledged as a critical area of the project management discipline. The Association for Project Management (APM) defines it as: "The systematic identification, analysis and planning of actions to communicate with, negotiate with and influence stakeholders."

Analysis and planning are traditional project management skills, but it could be argued that the behavioural skills of communication, negotiation and influencing stakeholders, are frequently the critical components of project success. Communication is particularly key to James' project work, not least because his partnership



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team reports to both the NHS and to Leeds City Council, making him the route to a truly ‘joined up’ approach to health and social care in the Leeds area. His projects affect people working within Primary Care Trusts (PCTs), mental health trusts, local hospitals, voluntary agencies and many more stakeholder groups. James is particularly skilled in the area of consultation; communicating the goals of a project to all the agencies and individuals involved and seeking a detailed understanding of their specific perspectives, so that the final project result is one that benefits everyone. Many are involved in the workshops and events that contribute to this consultation process, but it is James’ responsibility to plan these, oversee them, and finally check that they deliver what is really needed.

#### **A technical skill?**

“Project management is often thought of as a technical skill,” comments James, “But, this is not really the case. It’s all about talking to the right people in the right way, and using language that means something to your target audience, so that they can really relate to your aims and get enthusiastic about the project, understanding its benefits and the difference it could make to them.”

James is a PRINCE2® practitioner, holding a qualification that is all about the importance of process, so he is keen to stress that communication skills alone would never make a good project manager. “You need the framework and the sound governance that a carefully stepped process is likely to encourage,” he continues.

“Putting the various elements of documentation together brings you closer to the detail of a project and makes you stop and ask questions - those critical questions that can make the difference between ‘just doing the job’ and achieving best practice.

“The NHS has a philosophy of continuous improvement,” he concludes. “My work is in Leeds, but if you do something well, you can get personal recognition at a national level and the chance to spread best practice to other regions. The bottom line is that my projects are worthwhile, not only to me, but to the incredibly broad range of people that they affect.”

#### **For further information please contact:**

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