Real-life story - Ed Reid

Ed was always interested in IT and what it can do for business and to improve communication. See how his career has seen him progress from providing technical solutions to delivering large trust-wide projects.

Ed Reid

Programme head

Employer or university
> NHS Digital

Salary range
> Over £65K

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How I got into the role

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At 17, I was into all aspects of IT - what it could do for business, gaming and improving communication between people - and I was intrigued about how it could save us all time and money. This was at the start of the internet revolution. I worked for a private business for the first seven years, swapping paper records for electronic ones, purchase orders, customer orders, accounts, logistics and warehousing, all of which were transformed by technology.

After a short spell providing IT support in a university, I got my first job in the NHS in 1997, the same day my son was born! My first job included putting in the first chief executive email systems, which quickly blossomed into a 22-year career where I've broadly done the same job, just on different scales.

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What I do

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What I do is take the tasks and processes that people do, take out what's done on paper and replace it with digital solutions. Of course nowadays we often start with digital, but it's not always the case.

In the last 18 months I led the development of a large-scale programme for South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, a big mental health trust. I spent most of my time supporting the managers delivering the various workstreams, ensuring that they had a clear set of objectives and tasks, and that they had all the resources they needed to deliver the programme. So there was lots of communication involved via face-to-face meetings and email. The rest of the time I worked with the senior managers from the trust and the supplier to ensure we were all going in the right direction.

Over my career, I've moved from providing just technical solutions to delivering bigger projects that bring together the necessary people and processes. I've worked with some great people along the way and probably learnt most of what I know from them.

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The best bits and challenges

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Working on the programme meant I met staff at all levels of seniority, which I loved. I heard first hand that they need IT systems that support their day-to-day work. It was inspiring for me and the team to get up every day and try and provide them with one system that did that. One unintentional aspect to it was showing the executive team how their organisation actually works! They were surprised by what the business analysis showed them and we often heard the phrase "well I didn't know that we did that" or "I didn't know we did it in that way".

One thing I'd like to change about the role is the paperwork! I have so many reports to write that say very similar things to many different assurance groups, which can distract from the main goal of delivering a programme.

One of the biggest myths in project management is that the project manager has all the answers to any problems, and that they are experts in the area or business/organisation they are working in. In this case I certainly wasn't an expert on delivering great mental health care. But I provided a focal point for those who are which was the glue that joined people together as they sought to figure out the right answers.

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  ## Life outside work

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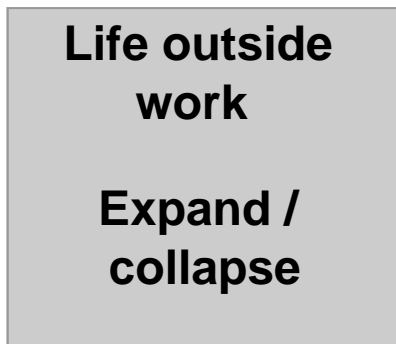
I have a few hobbies that can be a great distraction to work. In 2018 I refurbished a holiday cottage in North Wales and run that as a holiday let which has been a great success. Lots of what's involved in looking after guests could be seen like work, but it genuinely feels different and almost fun!

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  ## Career plans and top tips for others

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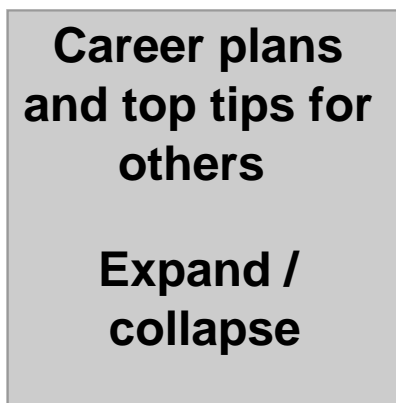
I'm a life-long learner and have never stopped learning what I can, from technical studies (both academic and professional) through to management studies and project management methods and techniques.

I really enjoyed studying for my MBA; the group I worked with, including the lecturers, were great.

But the qualification I'm proudest of is my humble HNC in computing. I worked for it over 2.5 years part time, evenings and weekends, and paid for it out of my own pocket. It really gave me the basis for understanding the topic and is still a reference point today.

I'm a Member of the Association of Project Managers (MAPM) and a Registered Project Professional (RPP). My next step is to apply for Chartered Status this year and I've been looking at becoming a member of the British Computer Society as well.

My advice to others is to try to do yourself out of a job. Project management skills can be learnt so try and share what you know with others and get them to do the same. The wide range of competencies in 21st Century project management is extensive and you probably won't be an expert in them all. But as you improve your competence, you will move up the value chain to your next job, adding more value to the organisation.

To flourish, I believe you need to be focused, resilient and organised.