

CONSIDERING A CAREER IN PROJECT CONTROLS?

Three APM members share their stories



THE **CHARTERED BODY** FOR THE
PROJECT PROFESSION

INTRODUCTION

Project controls provides wonderful opportunities to help deliver amazing projects as an integral part of a multidiscipline team. It attracts people not only from project management roles, but from many different routes – for example, in one APM member's project controls team there are colleagues who started out in civil engineering and construction, an architect, a marketing professional and another who has a physics degree. In their words: it can catch everyone and give them opportunities.

With multiple routes into the profession and a multitude of tasks making up the project controller's day job, there's no 'one-size-fits-all' career path through project controls. One of the best things about being a project controls professional is the opportunity to work on exciting projects that make a difference to the lives of many people. Whether the project is large or small, specialist or 'everyday', it is always rewarding to be able to apply project controls knowledge in all these environments with equally impressive outcomes.

PAUL BRADLEY

“ The foundations for good-quality project delivery are set by the project controls function ”

How did you get into project controls and what is your current role and project?

I am currently the group head of programme controls, planning and reporting for QinetiQ and have responsibility for developing the project controls function to support project and programme delivery across the global business. My background has been in project and programme management and prior to my taking up the role in QinetiQ, I was responsible for all aspects of the delivery portfolio in a joint industry/government partnership. My understanding of project, programme and portfolio management (P3M) and the practical development of project management offices (PMOs) contributed to my suitability for the current role.

How does project controls contribute to more effective delivery of projects?

I firmly believe that the foundations for good-quality project delivery are set by the project controls function. The core activities of planning, scheduling,

baselining, monitoring, control and reporting are delivered by project controls specialists. They are the 'navigator' to the project manager 'pilot'. Without the solid application of good practice, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain projects to time, quality and schedule constraints, and the project manager is continually firefighting. Our project and programme managers should be given the bandwidth to provide leadership, vision, stakeholder management and strategic direction, leaving the more technical aspects of project management to the project controller.

What would be your advice to anyone wanting to develop their career in project controls?

I would suggest they recognise the vital nature of the peer-to-peer relationship between project manager and project controller, develop a real understanding of the key processes, systems and ways of working within their company, and be confident to challenge and put their ideas forward. It's also important to keep a good sense of humour when the waters get a little choppy!





SUE SIMMONITE



There will always be a need for great planning and project control capability to establish the foundations that make for successful projects



How did you get into project controls and what is your current role and project?

I work for BAE Systems as the group head of project controls in the head office project management team. It's a role I'm really proud of. Together with my Corporate Planning, Monitoring and Control (PM&C) Working Group, I'm accountable for developing and leading the company strategy for PM&C capability improvements (people, process and tools) and guiding their implementation into our global business units.

My interest in planning and project controls started back in the year 2000 when I was on a secondment to what was then our BAE Systems North America office, based in Washington, DC. When I returned to the UK, I joined our then RO Defence business unit as a senior project controller on the Howitzer programme, based at Barrow, Cumbria. From there on my career has always been in planning and project controls and I've worked on some amazing projects, including Nimrod, Tornado and Typhoon across all phases of the project life cycle.

How does project controls contribute to more effective delivery of projects?

I fundamentally believe that planning, monitoring and control is the foundation of project success.

Our contribution as a community is vital to our organisations' ability to achieve flawless execution of our range of complex project, programmes and portfolios on time, to cost and to quality. Across BAE Systems globally we are investing in improving our planning and project control capability. Having our PM&C teams engaged in understanding, developing and influencing a project's early life cycle phases is critical and a key 'left shift' focus for the business.

What would be your advice to anyone wanting to develop their career in project controls?

Do it! There are great opportunities available and a growing recognition of the importance of planning and project controls as a career worldwide. Working in this area with BAE Systems has given me so many opportunities, from shaping successful bids with our customers, supporting major project delivery teams, driving closure of our project contracts (everyone forgets this bit!) and leading the continuous development and improvement of our capabilities. As the world and, ultimately, our projects become more complex, there will always be a need for great planning and project control capability to establish the foundations that make for successful projects. Why would you not want to be a part of that?

LEE McDONAGH

“ Project controls forces you to measure what can be measured and by the very act of measuring it, you start to manage it

How did you get into project controls and what is your current role and project?

I'm operations director in project controls for international consultancy and construction company Mace. My current project is working on a complex national construction programme for a major UK government department.

I started out as a civil engineer and got into project controls while recovering from a football injury. I really enjoyed the mix of skills it needed, so moved into project management roles. I focused increasingly on planning and controls, eventually joining Mace on the Olympic Park project in 2007. That's where I truly learned what controls is in terms of a broader role in very complex project delivery. The Olympic Park was a success and UK plc benefited hugely from it.

How does project controls contribute to more effective delivery of projects?

There's a statement that what can be measured, can be managed. Project controls forces you to measure what

can be measured and by the very act of measuring it, you start to manage it. When it works well you get the information early enough to be able to do something about it.

The correlation with projects that go well and those that have project controls is quite strong. There's a wide range of examples of projects without controls that went awry, going over budget and missing deadlines. Conversely, projects with strong controls in place – like the Olympic Stadium – are generally successful.

What would be your advice to anyone wanting to develop their career in project controls?

Ask lots of questions, be curious, find out all you can. If you want a career working on really interesting projects, have a real interest in working with numbers or words, are a bit sceptical and questioning, good at getting people to talk to you and can put a coherent argument across, then project controls could be a really fulfilling career for you. Equally, though, if you prefer analysing data all day, you can – there are so many facets to project controls.



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HOW APM CAN HELP

Now you've heard from three of our members about their career in project controls, find out how APM, the chartered body for the project profession, can help you develop your career in this area:

- **Gain professional status through APM membership.**
- **Participate in a growing network of professionals dedicated to project controls by joining APM specific interest groups (SIGs).**
- **Enhance your knowledge and understanding by taking one of our professional qualifications.**
- **Find the best project controls jobs by visiting our careers hub.**

For more information please visit our website apm.org.uk