Christiaan Murphy from the SoftwareSpend podcast interviews Christian Shawcross from PSD Group. The discussion ranges from how to improve your CV and your LinkedIn profile to the demand for technology procurement professionals and what employers are looking for in a successful candidate.

What follows are the show notes from this podcast episode. You can find the recording at:
http://www.softwarespend.com/ssp008-interview-with-christian-shawcross-from-psd-group/

Introduction to the PSD Group

PSD is a large recruitment organisation with around 280 consultants worldwide and seven offices: three in the UK, two in Germany and two in the Far East (Shanghai and Hong Kong). PSD's focus is mid to senior appointments. PSD is organised by market sector and discipline. Christian's area of expertise is procurement, sourcing, supply chain and outsourcing, with focus on the financial services industry.

When referring to "mid to senior positions", Christian means anything from about £60k to £200k annual salary (€75k - €250k). The average is in the £80k to £120k bracket (€100k - €150k).

Financial Services Clients

Financial services organisations have complex and advanced sourcing organisations especially around software, hardware and telecoms. Large organisations like HSBC spend a lot of money on technology procurement. One of the major issues Christian is seeing is in risk mitigation. The technology market is also very dynamic, with new business models such as cloud developing.

Questions from the SoftwareSpend LinkedIn Group

The DOs and DON'Ts when preparing your CV

Bozhidar Stoyanov asks: "As a procurement professional, what are the 2x "DO" and 2x "Don't DO" I shall beware when putting together my CV?"

- Put your savings achievements on your CV. Even although this is only one KPI amongst others, prospective employers will want to see quantified savings on the CV. This sticks out on your CV and helps differentiate you from others. Don't provide too many details, as this might cause issues if suppliers and specific projects can be identified. You should make this an obvious point

of conversation for the interview so that the prospective employer is keen to know more about the project.

Form filling and CV formats

Nathalie Dhenin-Buclon asks: "What do you think of the multiplication of online forms (LinkedIn being just another one !) ? Is there a value in making our experience match the recruiter format, or is it another brain exercise to revamp the same info with another format... Or just another hurdle to see who's really motivated ?"

- Christian has never had experience of clients asking for just the LinkedIn profile. Some clients ask for the original CV and other clients ask for all the CVs to be in the same format. Recruitment consultants at PSD do not add anything or take anything away, but they do like to put all CV's into the same format so that the client can see where the CV has come from. Other clients want to see original CVs as this shows how they see themselves and how they present themselves to the world.

Job hopping vs length of service

Dragos Tache asks: "Why do recruiters believe that candidates who have spent several years (7-10) in one company doing many jobs are less desirable than the ones having switched companies every other year or sooner for the promise of a slightly more attractive salary, basically job hunting? Do they not realize that they might be missing out on a loyal employee and going for an employee who's likely to leave the company in less than a year proving to be a costly (recruitment) mistake?"

- There is no real "one size fits all" rule for this. Clients will tend to get a bit nervous if there are three or four 12 - 18 month tenures. There can be three year life cycles in procurement where the projects and strategies are carried out over three years and then there is a change of direction, so three years seems to be a acceptable length of time to remain in one role. The key is to show steady and logical progression from one role to the next - so more responsibility or a bigger challenge from one role to the next is very desirable. Employers like to see a steady trajectory. A longer period with one company is fine too, but again the key is to show steady progression over that period. Moving from one category to another, or taking on more responsibility should be accentuated on a CV to show prospective employers that the candidate is ambitious and capable of taking on new challenges.

The recruiter always asks: "How much do you current earn?"

Jan Vanderstraeten asks: "Why does a recruiter always asks for your current salary and why do they then come up with job offers that only have a 5% increase on your current income? and also Why do headhunters always treat employers as clients and don't they consider their candidates as clients?"

- Christian explains that when a CV is presented to a client, the first thing they will ask is "what is this person's salary?" If the candidate will not say, then this can be seen as a sign that they are hiding something. It can be judged negatively and, therefore, it can get the whole recruitment process off to a bad start.

- Clients have a team of procurement people all earning a certain amount. They also have a salary bands structure that the candidate would have to fit into. The prospective employer is constrained as to what they can and can't do as regards salary. So they are trying to assess early in the recruitment process whether they can afford someone. Is it worth investing the time to interview this person and consider them for the role if they would not move for the salary being offered.
- Most employers realise that no one is going to move for the same salary or for less. Typically, employers will offer an increase of 12% - 15%. Employers will not offer more than that unless it can be demonstrated that the candidate is clearly not earning enough compared to the market.

How can you avoid being offered a salary below your expectations?

Stephanie Volkers asks: "Why inviting a procurement candidate for an interview if it appears that the person is overqualified after reading the CV. Take the candidate through the whole process and then offer a low salary on graduate level?"

- Christian says that this should not happen if the assessment is open and honest from all parties at the start. It can happen due to the recruiter or the candidate or the employer or all three not wanting the process to fall apart at the beginning, and so they continue without taking a realistic view of budgets or candidate's willingness to move etc.
- Dealing with procurement people on one side and procurement people on the other side, both are trained negotiators. They both know not to accept the first offer. Christian is surprised when, from time to time, a first offer is accepted. Most of the time there is a bit of negotiation going on.
- There needs to be some disclosure at the start of the process: what is the package being offered and is there sufficient interest from the candidate. If there is not enough interest, then there is no point in continuing.

What is the demand for software procurement professionals?

Christiaan Murphy asks: "Banks and financial services organisations probably have been developing their technology (and specifically software) procurement capabilities for a long time already. Do you see other companies now taking an interest in software procurement? What is the demand for software procurement professionals?"

- Christian says that this is definitely what he is seeing. It is the one category where there is a steady flow of new opportunities throughout the year. Christian thinks that this is because of the changing nature of technology. There is always something new happening in software (and in hardware and telecom). The fundamentals in most other categories do not change much, but in software there is a constant development in the technology and in the market.
- Smaller companies are realising that software can do so much for their business, but at the same time software deals are not easy to do. Signing up to a software agreement that does not meet the business needs, and if you can't get out of that deal for many years then it can be catastrophic. So smaller organisations are becoming more interested in software procurement, not just from a savings perspective, but also from a risk mitigation perspective.
- Negotiating software agreements requires very specific expertise. The market for people with these skills is very buoyant and always will be according to Christian.

What is the market like for interim roles?

Christiaan Murphy asks: "Does PSD Group recruit for interim positions as well as full-time positions?"

- Yes, Christian has two people on his team who are focused specifically on interim roles.
- Technology procurement seems to attract interim positions. Given the speed with which deals have to be done, and the fact that once a contract is signed there is often not much activity with the vendor besides vendor/contract management during the term of the agreement. Therefore, it often makes sense to bring someone in to negotiate the deal with that vendor. There a number of very good interim people specifically aligned to software. One person who has a reputation for being very good at software deals, specifically with Microsoft.
- Interim assignments tend to be with the larger organisations. Big retail banks, for example, will have 12 month interim assignments, some will even hire interims for two years. This goes to show what kind of savings can be generated by these people and the massive value that technology sourcing people can bring.
- Again Christian stresses that clients are not just looking at savings when they hire these expensive consultants. Organisations are also heavily focus on risk mitigation, and they will often forego savings to make sure that they have the right deal with the right supplier so that damage limitation is kept to a minimum. These types of assignments are where interim contractors score very heavily.
- Day rates for a Category Manager with 10 years plus experience are between £500 - £750 per day (€620 - €930).

Advice for using LinkedIn effectively in your career progression

Christiaan Murphy asks: "On the topic of social media, is LinkedIn the only place you look? How do you use social media? How do you search on LinkedIn?"

- LinkedIn is a very good tool for what recruiters do, which is to build profiles of people. Before LinkedIn, recruiters would just build profiles by more traditional means: talking to colleagues about individuals and taking recommendations from people before making an approach to someone. LinkedIn just makes that process a whole lot faster and a little bit more qualified. Recruiters can see almost instantly if someone is going to be right for a role or not. In Christian's opinion it helps everyone, including candidates because they should not be getting calls about positions for which they are not suited.
- However, Christian stresses that LinkedIn does not remove the need for human interaction. Human interaction remains crucially important in good recruiting.
- LinkedIn is also improving as a tool. You can now include certificates, presentations and project documents on LinkedIn to demonstrate your experience. But the basics remain the same: who are you, what have you done, who have you done it for and what are you all about - from that perspective it is a very good tool.

Christiaan Murphy asks: "Are you using LinkedIn to find candidates, or are you using LinkedIn to check candidates out once you have found them from other sources?"

- Christian says that he uses it in both ways. It is definitely possible to use LinkedIn to new people and expand your contacts using LinkedIn. Christian says that he does a lot of that and he find LinkedIn a good tool for doing that. But equally, it is good for checking out recommendations to determine whether or not the person is a good fit for the role. Overall though, Christian uses LinkedIn more for searching for candidates than anything else.
- The one big tip Christian would give on how to use LinkedIn is that you should really choose your photograph well. Rightly or wrongly, it can be judged. You should try to control that judgement

with a very professional photo wearing business attire: shirt and tie for gents and suitably sober attire for ladies. Nothing flashy - keep you look as boring as possible.

Procurement qualifications - MBA and CIPS and when to consider them

Christiaan Murphy asks: "On the subject of relevant procurement qualifications, what is your view of specific procurement/supply chain qualifications such as Certified Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS)? And of the other popular qualification for procurement people at a certain point in their career; the MBA? How are these qualifications seen by employers?"

- Christian says that it is very rare that he would get asked by a client to specifically recruit for candidates with a CIPS qualification. It is also rare that a candidate would get rejected because they do not have a CIPS qualification. Having said that, Christian highly recommends people to take the CIPS qualification as it looks great on a CV, you learn a lot from it, but also you will have plenty of opportunities to network through the CIPS organisation and especially when you are doing your exams etc.
- MBAs - if you can do one, you should. Christian has seen people's careers skyrocket once they have got their MBA. Clearly, you need to think very carefully about it as the cost can easily be £20,000 or more. What an MBA gives you is exactly what senior management is looking for in the procurement function: stakeholder management, modelling, projections, strategic overhauls of categories, how to align with stakeholders etc. There is a lot in the modern MBA that can help the sourcing professional. One person in particular Christian thinks of who, once he got his MBA, suddenly the types of roles available to him were greatly increased. If you can afford it, Christian would highly recommend and MBA.
- There can be a certain value to choosing a premium MBA, but it is more important to look at the curriculum and choose an MBA based on what you will learn and who is teaching the MBA, rather than based on the name alone.
- Employers take a dim view of people who demand an immediate increase in their salary on the basis that they have just completed an MBA. If you do an MBA, use it wisely. Go back to your management in the company you already work for and use the MBA to open more opportunities and take on more responsibility in the types of projects you do. If you then feel that you have outgrown the opportunities available to you in that organisation, then you might want to enter onto the job market to look for new opportunities. That way there are some extra things on your CV that you have done as a direct result of you having done the MBA.

Christiaan Murphy asks: "At what stage in a person's career would it be best to consider doing an MBA?"

- If you get 5 - 8 years experience before doing an MBA, then the MBA will probably have a little bit more power to it. There is nothing wrong with doing an MBA straight after university. It shows that you are ambitious and that you are on a steep trajectory. However, if you have some experience first, it gives the MBA more context and the MBA will be more meaningful.
- In the case of CIPS, Christian recommends that if you are a Buyer and you have had one or two years experience in a procurement role and you enjoy it and you think that procurement is a good career path for you, then it is a good time to get a CIPS qualification.

Look before your leap - think carefully before entering the job market

Last tips from Christian…

- Before you enter the job market, think about it carefully and be sure that you want to move. One of the most frustrating things for employers and recruiters is to be going through the recruitment process with a candidate, the employer may be making plans for that candidate, and then at the last minute the candidate changes their mind. Employers can have long memories and doing that can harm your career opportunities long term.
- Christian will sometimes be approached by people who wish to enter into the employment market to get away from issues at the current employer. In these situations, Christian will advise the candidate to discuss the issues with their manager to see if they can be resolved, and sometimes the candidate gets those issues resolved and continues happily in their current position.

Benefits being offered besides salary

Christiaan Murphy asks: "What are employers offering, besides financial compensation, to attract talent."

- Christian says that more and more candidates are asking for flexible working (home working) and more and more employers are offering this. It is usually difficult in the first six months when relationships with stakeholders need to be built. In software procurement, due to the very nature of the role, it should be offered and where it is offered it can be the deciding point in getting the right candidate.
- The other thing that attracts talent is the interest in the challenge of the role. Procurement people want to work and want to work hard. If there is no challenge, then it does not matter what compensation and benefits are being offered. There must be an emotional pull to the job. If it is an interesting and challenging position, then candidates will be more flexible in the compensation and benefits they will accept.
- Other benefits that help attract talent are things like: cash alternatives to company car or extra holidays. These things are important, but the "wow" factor has to be there in terms of the interest of the job - that is first and foremost what attracts high-quality candidates.

Fancy working in Switzerland?

As a closing plug, Christian asks that if anyone listening is a strong software sourcing professional and lives in Switzerland, or would like to live in Switzerland, then he may have an attractive role for you. Send your CV through to Christian.

More generally, if anyone is on the job market and would like to reach out to Christian, don't hesitate. Christian is always happy to discuss opportunities with people who would like to enter into the job market.

If you have any additional questions, please post them in the LinkedIn group and Christian will be happy to answer them.

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