**IT Interview**

**IT Professional: Charles**

**Job Title: Professional Services Manager**

**Company Background**

The company that Charles works for a company that provides end-to-end implementation of point of sale system for supermarket as well as providing continuing support after implementation to ensure fixes are implemented for issues that may arise. The segments of sales system includes scanning of items, barcode generation, inventory management, receipt printing, EFTPOS terminal, which is not an exhaustive list. The company also performs test to ensure the system is operating successfully prior to implementation.

**Customer base**: large and small supermarket

**Job Description**

Charles started IT career in 2003 working in banking. Over the years, he has had various roles from IT support, operation, data analysis, as well as a leadership role of team who performs accounts payable. He joined his current company as an ERP consultant, and has been recently promoted as a professional services manager.

ERP consultant job description: Customers raise tickets of issues they face in which an ERP consultant then trouble shoots the problem. The issues are very much ad-hoc and varies which includes self-check out, point of sale terminal issue, virtual machine in cloud, and so on. Issues are also prioritised into level and Charles mentioned that he manages level 2 and 3 IT issues. He also need to log the time that he spends on the issue in the ticket. As part of his work, Charles also provides implementation and setting up end-to-end point of sale for a new supermarket.

Professional services manager description: Charles engages and deals with clients to understand clients needs and issues (addressing questions such as why this issue arises, what resources need to be allocated to address the issue, how fast to fix the issue i.e., how long it takes to create and launch the patch (or codes) to fix the issue), manages internal teams (such as development team, testing team), assigns internal resources/team to be allocated to address client issues. Charles is also responsible for system upgrades and rolling them out to the clients. He is to ensure that the operational of the clients are not impacted and should issues arise impacting on operational of sales, he needs to ensure these are addressed fast and ensure minimum downtime as it affects sales and revenues of clients.

**Tools used within the company**

Autotask version 6 for ticketing system which allows invoicing and billing clients. A project can be generated, tasks to keep track of project and deliverables.

JIRA is used by development teams to addressing bugs, implementing code changes, fixes and patches. JIRA is also linked to auto task ticketing system which allows transparency in terms of the progress of the fix and what is being done to provide the fix.

The work deals with data that comes with different forms including Microsoft Excel, notepad, csv file. Knowing the basic of excel comes useful including conditional formatting, filtering and chart.

Other tools used include: database, SQL Server, batch files, command line scripts, phyton, in-house software with 20 years development behind it, confluence for documentation.

**Interaction with other people**

Charles interacts with clients in two ways. The first to implement end-to-end point of sale system. This includes speaking with clients to understand clients’ requirements for hardware and software. The second is maintaining relationship with clients to ensure smooth operations of the sale system. This includes ensuring that when clients raise issues, that they are addressed quickly especially when it impacts the operation. Charles also communicates with internal teams to ensure appropriate teams with the right skill to resolve the issues are allocated to the tickets raised, and appropriate feedback and communication are provided back to the clients in terms of how and the timeline of when issues will be fixed. Good and clear communication with both external and internal teams are crucial in the role of professional services manager.

**Skills required for IT Graduates**

The questions asked was what the top three skills for ERP consultant are, however Charles did not provide the top skill required to be an ERP consultant. He emphasised that our career interest in future may not specifically to be an ERP consultant, but that we would most likely be interested in other areas. As each IT area requires different set of technical skills, he recommends that we equip ourselves to have under our belt the following technical skills:

• Database.

Learn SQL server

Charles mentioned that we could learn Oracle and SQL server but emphaised that in general SQL server is preferred. This is because most organisations use Microsoft and SQL server. Oracle on the other hand is mostly used for much larger and bigger organisation. Having said this Oracle are also used by smaller organisation.

• Programming language

Learn both object oriented programming and functional programming.

By knowing how to program with these two, we would be able to easily learn other programming languages. Even though each programming language has different syntax, the fundamental programming logic is similar.

To start learning programming Charles suggested that we start with HTML, CSS, Javascript to give the web application know how.

Phyton is the best programming language to learn. Phyton is widely used and will enable us to program anything. This is because Phyton has a wide range libraries that includes building web app, artificial intelligence, data analytics amongst other things. PHP allows to build web app. C Sharp and Dot Net.

**Is Soft Skills as Important as Hard Skills?**

Charles advises that soft skills are as important as technical skills and that you cannot undermine the power of soft skills. Even though the jobs of programmer such as in DevOps that spends a lot of time coding, the programmer has to be able to convey the program that he/she has written, what has gone right or wrong, fixes that the programmer has applied to fix the issue - all of which require extremely good communication skills and being able to interact with others well.

When Charles recruits, he always look those with good strong soft skills.

In terms of technical skills, Charles prefers a candidate who has completed project on the side and can show case that the person is not only interested in working only from 9 am to 5 pm, but someone who will take pride in his/her professional development and wanting to excel at his/her work.

**Work Life Balances**

Work and life balance will depend on the company that we would be working for. In his company, Charles works 9:30 am to 6:00 pm with 1 hour break. There is a trend of hybrid work where people work from home continuing from the work habit from there was covid restrictions to work from home. Charles personally would work Monday and Friday from home. His preference is to work in the office as he feels that he is more productive in the office.

He keeps his work life balance by exploring outdoor and seeing greenery.

**How to Keep Up with Professional Development**

The question you need to ask in IT is “How do you make things better than they are at the moment.” Questions such as “how can we automate task, how can we make things more efficient, etc.” Professional development depends on the fields of IT. However it is crucial that we spend time outside work to develop our professional development as IT is an ever evolving area which means the professional need to keep updating their knowledge. As an example: if JIRA is one of the tool that we use, Charles recommends that we would learn a part of JIRA every day so that we would know JIRA inside out. Even though we may not know everything in detail, we would at least know what JIRA can do and which area we may need to upskill in the future to meet business needs.

As a second example: if we were learning database, we may want to study a segment of the database in more detail such as back-up and recovery. Or we may want to study on how to improve processes such as database performance tuning. For example: if it takes 5 minutes to run a query, we could find out on how we could improve the performance so that it runs the query within a few second. These attitude to keep improving ourselves will go a long way as we each will go and work in our selected fields in the future.

**Challenges at work**

On the second interview with Charles, we were able to pinpoint the challenges he faced at his work. Charles informed that the main challenge at work come from ever-increasing customer demand. Customer demand is not static but ever changing and evolving. The demand come from firstly resolving issues that affect operations, and secondly from providing solutions to meet customers ever changing operational requirements.

The first source of challenge come from resolving issues affecting operation. These issues are resolved within the guideline provided by the Service Level Agreement (SLA). The SLA is client-tailored and client-specific. For example: issues that impact production or point of sale need to be looked at within 1 hour by technical team and has to have a turn around of resolving the issues within a few hours to 24 hours. The reasons of downtime come from many different aspects but for confidentiality reasons they are not disclosed.

The second challenge at work come from the need to tailor the system to meet ever changing operational requirements. Customers require the system to be adaptable and flexible in terms of being able to provide promotion, discounts, Christmas program, loyal program and so on. All of these require creation of projects that involve technical team to perform work to be completed in the system, as well as timeline for rolling out the project. The pressure is on when the deadline is tight as delivery becomes critical. The team always need to balance customers needs, as well as creating plausible delivery.