

Meet the Advantage trainer: Wietse Heidema

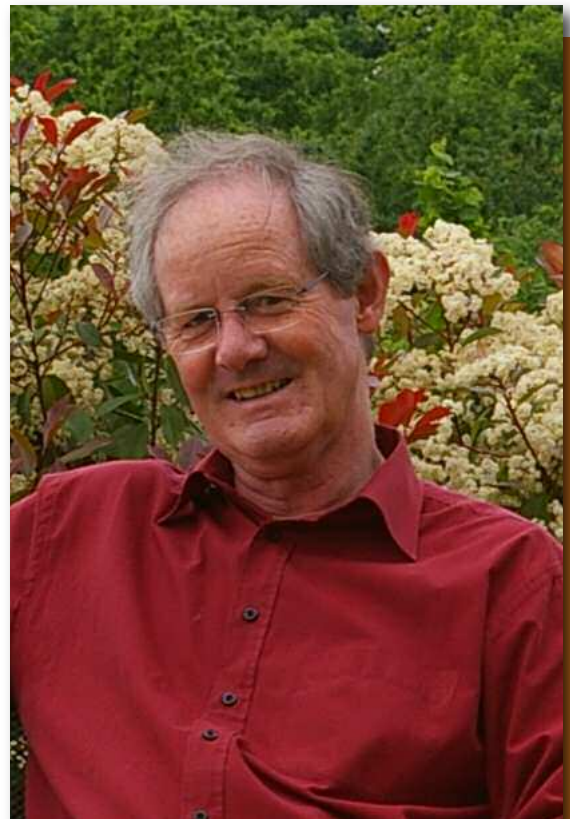
Wietse Heidema's critical powers have taken him a long way: from the Netherlands around the world and now to south-west France. His skill for critical analysis makes him one of the most effective trainers in the project management world. His speciality is PRINCE2 and he teaches it in four languages – Dutch, German, English and French.

"I think I am one of the few trainers in the PRINCE2 community who can teach in four languages," admits Wietse. "It really means the world is my oyster. I have delivered PRINCE2 training all over the world, thereby introducing myself into new cultures and different ways of thinking. That is one of the most interesting parts of being a PRINCE2 trainer."

Wietse came to PRINCE2 as something of a sceptic and remains a "critical believer". "I was introduced to PRINCE2 in 1998 when I was teaching ITIL in Holland. At that time I was a little bit critical of it. I had been teaching so many different [project management] methods which all had their merits. At first, I thought this is just one of the many, let's see what it does."

Today Wietse is still convinced that PRINCE2 is an "excellent method and one of the strongest – if not the strongest – there is". However, he is always putting it under the scrutiny of his critical powers. "For PRINCE2 to work for you, you have to conclude first that it has some merit for you; that it helps you solve a problem that you are baffled about. If that is the case, then I have no doubt that you will adopt PRINCE2 as I have done."

For a man who sets great store in analysis and criticism, it is not surprising that Wietse identifies the way PRINCE2 structures a new project as one of its key strengths. "The greatest benefit lies in the beginning of the project: where you help your client to think about its added value. It is in that drive for quantifiable targets or goals for your project that you make it more controllable. The first activity, when I start a PRINCE2 project, is to convince myself that this project is worth doing. So I am the most critical question-asker in the group."



Wietse Heidema

A culture of asking questions is not always the norm, as Wietse found out while working in the wake of Communism in the early 1990s in Poland. "We organised training programmes for the Gdansk shipyards. We were invited by Solidarity and Lech Walesa, so we got a pretty good entrance into Polish society there."

But working there highlighted how dramatically Polish culture was going to change. "At the start of the training, I asked them to imagine that I'm the general manager of a Polish company with a project statement and that they are the project managers who need to know more about it. To my surprise – and bewilderment – they didn't know what to ask. I asked 'why aren't you asking critical questions?' They replied: 'We are not allowed to question the validity of what our manager says – if we do that, it is the way to be kicked out. So then you see what kind of cultural change you have to put them through for them to really be a project manager.'"

Wietse's ability to empower project managers comes from many years of training. In the early days of computerisation, he was lured from the technical side into training the first generation of IT users. "I found it intriguing to see how you can try to convince people that it might be a good idea to be using those systems instead of the old paper ones. That got me thinking about how do people actually work together and how you motivate people to do things they have never done before." He progressed to management and leadership training, adding experience from working with companies such as Kraft, Cap Gemini, Frankfurt Airport, SUN Microsystems.

It was in the 1980s that Wietse became interested in psychotherapy. "It was very helpful as I learnt an enormous amount about how to deal with conflicts between people and how to deal with people in crisis situations. I'm now a registered stress consultant which I find helpful for projects," he adds

In fact it's developed into Wietse's hidden talent. "The psychotherapy training steered me away from being too 'instrumental' and helped me give room to my intuition. I found out that my natural skills of analysis and my intuition together are a very powerful tool for me."

Training PRINCE2 allows Wietse to live in a beautiful part of France where he indulges his passion for gardening and since moving to Aquitaine in 2007, he is transforming a former vineyard into a beautiful oasis on a steep hillside.

Life in France has also meant Wietse has experienced another training culture at first hand. "Project Management in France is largely unknown territory but there are signs things are changing. A number of large international companies and French organisations are using PRINCE2 so there are some champions – like Airbus or the French Stock Exchange – some powerful players that really do it. There is also presidential backing for a standardised project management approach."

3 things we didn't know ...

Where do you get your business inspiration?

An English writer I admire very much for giving good insights into how project management developed over the ages is Ken Follet, author of *Pillars of the Earth* and *World Without End*. They are about architecture and its development from the Middle Ages until the late 1600s. You see examples of how you can have very good ideas of project management but, if you can't motivate the people, you get nowhere. It's from those sorts of sources that I draw my inspiration.

What was the last music you bought?

A collection of Requiems by different composers. I listen to them at home and I also sing them in the choirs my wife and I are members of. I don't usually listen to music when I travel because I have too much to see and too many people to speak to. One of the fun parts of travel is meeting people.

What's your hidden talent?

I can pilot a plane. I haven't yet used my pilot's licence in France, but I keep my flying skills alive by using Flight Simulator.



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