Early Career Journey: Alex Bardsley

Key Education

Qualifications

Cardiff University: MChem with Integrated Year in Industry

Prince 2 Agile Foundation & Practioner

Key Skills

Project management

Software configuration and customisation

Customer training and support

AI integration

Challenge

In my current role not every project is a success or reaches the point of a sale, this could be quite a setback personally. However, in a Chemistry degree, experiments will fail and you will get negative results. Being able to reflect on these bad results and learn from them facilitates being able to take professional setbacks in your stride.

My Advice

When in STEM, tomorrow is rarely the same as today and you'll get to try so many different avenues of opportunity that you will truly find where you excel.

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Career Moves

What is your job now and what do you do each day?

My current role at Elixir Software is as a Senior Application Scientist and Project Manager based in Alderley Park in North West England. The main focal point of my role is delivering and supporting new scientific workflow solutions for pharmaceutical and biotech clients.

In the Application Scientist portion of my role I am the customers' point of contact in configuring our flexible toolkit to suit the customer needs. Although sometimes similar, each customer's requirements for the iTraX software are different. My responsibility is to manipulate the front-end of the software to configure it to match their requirements and then, once delivered, support and train the user base.

After working with Elixir for less than six months I got the opportunity to progress in the business. Elixir kindly supported me in securing an Agile project management qualification. With this qualification I am now able to manage the projects irrespective of whether I am also doing the Application Scientist responsibilities on that project as well.

How did you get into your current role and what have been your career moves?

The thing that really attracted me to a STEM degree was the fact that during my course I knew that I would have the opportunity to be able to learn about my course material not just via the means of lectures and literature but being able to get in the lab and see chemistry happen in front of my eyes. I liked how this transpired once I got to university and I spent almost 50% of my university hours in the lab, especially in my final year.

During my degree I got an opportunity to pursue my third year away from Cardiff in either an industrial setting or at another university abroad. Although many of my friends went to Europe or as far afield as Australia, I chose to do a year in Industry at PCI Pharma Services to gain experience. I spent the year in an analytical lab that greatly improved my problem solving skills and attention to detail, as well as giving me an understanding of the drug delivery process. The understanding of this process gave me a good base of understanding of customers' requirements in my current role.

In the time since I graduated and before joining Elixir I've had a number of roles and my Chemistry degree has benefitted me in each of them. Whether it was working in hospitality and retail or teaching English in China, the skills (communication, collaboration, analytical problem solving) I built upon during my degree put me on a great path to success.

Although I enjoyed my year in the analytical lab, I felt my career lay outside the lab yet still related to science. So to be able to build software to help scientists streamline their processes and hopefully increase efficiency was really a perfect match for me.

What skills and expertise have you gained?

The problem solving and analytical skills gained from a STEM degree would benefit you in almost every role available. To be able to encounter a problem, diagnose it, and then solve it is key in my current and previous roles.

Although not often thought of as a skill that develops in STEM degrees, communication, collaboration, and teamwork are pivotal in a lab setting and translate out of the lab too. My current role is customer facing and the projects that are taken on have a lot of cross-team dependencies.

What does the future hold?

Our software is always advancing and is a 'living' product that develops with each new customer requirement. Obviously, as is the case with many industries, AI integration represents one of the next big advancements in our software. Although I stay away from the coding and back-end of the software, I will be part of the team deciding how AI will be shown and interact with the front-end of the software.