

Article Press Release

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"INTEGRATION" IN THE WORK PLACE

A COMMENTARY ON UK BUSINESS' 20TH CENTURY USAGE OF 21ST CENTURY CONTROL TECHNIQUES

When I took my first hesitant steps into the world of Business, Commerce & Finance in the very early 1960s UK Ltd still had a large industrial base in steel, coal and manufacturing (including ships, cars, planes ,textiles, trains busses and bricks) you name it we made it. We even competed in the up and coming electronics industry and had started the process of exploring the North Sea for our own oil. Large remnants of our Empire still remained intact and our armed services were a major player in defending Western Europe against the threat of Communist Domination. The word emigration was used more than immigration and most of our service infrastructure was Nationalised. Communication was by relatively large static telephones or Royal Mail (not 'snail mail' as it is sometimes called today); radio and television broadcasting rarely encompassed events outside these shores. Our politicians told us that "we had never had it so good" and our economy, despite the setback of the Second World War, was one of the most powerful in the world. During this period, I began to notice a distinct lack of cohesion between, what I perceived as technical people and those, like me in finance and administration

Today things are very different, almost everything from the above list is the stuff of dim memory, but not quite everything. The good news is that we still have one of the strongest economies in the world. The bad news is, you guessed it; the continuing split, dare I say chasm, between commerce & finance on the one hand and technical and manufacturing on the other. Our working lives are governed by an inborn culture which varies from supreme indifference to competitive mistrust between persons involved in the above disciplines. From the office junior and shop floor apprentice through to the commercial and technical directors in the boardroom it's us and them. Of course, in these days of 'political correctness' it is generally suppressed but its ethos affects the very core of our working abilities.

Integrated business control techniques began gaining recognition in the 60s. These systems used PERT (Programme Evaluation & Review Technique) networks and cost collection systems developed from a WBS (Work Breakdown Structure) to monitor and control progress and spend. Such techniques were soon combined to produce 'earned value' information and focus attention on recognising and managing risk. Most of these initiatives were developed in the US and began to migrate to the UK as we moved into the 70s. My formative years in Industry did not bring me much contact with these systems as my employers were in the Steel and Oil industries. Sophisticated control techniques and integration between things technical and financial were almost as far

removed from such heavy industries as the 'Luddites' were from 'Bessemer' furnaces and 'nodding donkeys'

In 1973 I moved my career from the Oil to the Defence industry and was fortunate to join a company who were one of the leading exponents in the UK in using these techniques. These abilities gained them employment as a management company on a number of Defence development projects in the 70s and 80s. However, despite their good intentions, the attitude of most of the personnel involved, especially those employed in other companies was one of mistrust and annoyance. They paid little heed to the programme logic they should have been following and seemed to treat budgets as 'Oliver Twist's bowl', constantly asking for them to be replenished. The greatest part of the problem was that even when the systems were used properly and identified where things were going wrong, political manipulation of the true facts, totally negated the effectiveness of the techniques. Only when the overspend on such projects brought threatened cancellation were participating personnel focused sufficiently to use the systems effectively and bring things to a successful conclusion. Over time I became a passionate advocate of integrated control systems and 'integrated' teams of people to run them. Persuading companies to properly develop the first of the above was difficult, but the second bordered on the impossible.

Of course technical /financial success is never assured and things are bound to go wrong, particularly in such development projects referred to above . The whole point of management through integrated control systems is honest early identification of problems and the close involvement of all disciplines to bring things back on track. Initial budgets, baseline programmes and detailed risk analysis must be developed by everyone involved in the work. Finance and commercial personnel must have a good basic understanding of all the technical constraints and difficulties, similarly the development and production engineers must understand the commercial and financial restraints imposed upon their colleagues. Everyone must understand and accept that their responsibility does not end with discharge of their particular discipline but extends to the complete task. "Teflon Shoulders" must disappear and be replaced by ongoing responsibility by all to ensure success. Many of today's personality profiling questionnaires ask whether or not we are 'team players'. My belief is we should only tick the box if our approach is as described above.

Recent history is littered with proof that the above lessons have not been learnt; the Channel Tunnel, the Millennium Dome, Wembley Stadium, Heathrow terminal 5 (still going wrong!!) need I go on. Despite this I firmly believe in all the management techniques referred to above and have had the good fortune to use them to full effect, seeing their contribution to successful completion of projects. Such success depends on utilising integrated systems (specifications developed into Work Breakdown Structures, programme networks and cost budgets), but not only must the systems be integrated but so must the personnel developing and operating them. A machine does not work if one of its parts is broken or not properly interfacing with the rest of the machine. It is the same with the work place; those performing technical and commercial skills must integrate and work together understanding and supporting each others requirements and efforts to successfully achieve all necessary goals.

Whilst I can pass on my experience of developing and using such integrated systems through our training seminars, I cannot change deep rooted beliefs and cultures, well only slightly! During the mid 80s I was a member of a management recovery team who were attempting to bring the development of a personnel launched anti tank missile to completion. A programme manager from one of our contractors asked what my qualifications were. I replied that I had a Management

qualification and an Accountancy qualification. He thought for a moment and then replied “Oh you’re a clerk”. Some two years later I accepted his apology for this incident with some satisfaction; not that I minded being called a clerk, I’ve been called a lot worse!! But I knew that the work we had done together over the two years had left a lasting impression on him. He knew the systems worked and he also knew how he and the rest of the team should apply them.



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