

(Formerly the *People, Communication and Behaviour* SIG)

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## Watershed Issue

(4 pages of NEWSLETTER and 3 pages of Supplement)

**1 of 2 – October meeting report - by Pauline Bird**

**2 of 2 - Feedback from the last issue and general NEWS update**

**& 3 of 3 - Guide “pull out” Supplement – introducing the PIED PIPER**

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**Editorial opener** - This is the last full issue for 2009 and in fact for a while to allow for proper feedback on work to date. In the meantime, member's contributions and breaking news will be advised by bulletin as necessary.

Thank you to those who have enquired about progress with the Guide since it was submitted to the **irm** office earlier this year. I felt the best way to deal with this was by way of a separate supplement advising not only progress, but also a brief resume of the Guide, it's background, intentions and content - indeed, the majority of current readers will not be aware of this information. [Well, if we've not communicated this properly before to everybody, you know what they say about mechanics and the maintenance standards on their own cars!](#) Ed.

But first to attend to the business and news for the month:

**1 of 2 – October meeting report – by Pauline Bird**

The SIG's first meeting of the current season took place at the London Hospital on 14<sup>th</sup> October, Richard Mackie (Director for the Centre of Risk, QM Innovation Centre) shared his experiences of formalising and improving risk management systems for the Essex Fire and Rescue Service and he shared with the meeting some excellent risk management presentations (short film montages) that he had prepared himself, which he uses as teaching aids for the staff and students at the London Hospital and Queen Mary College. Richard successfully improved the auditors' rating of the Fire and Rescue Service's risk management systems from "poor" to "good" during his short tenure – his comments on the cultural aspects of the process were most illuminating! In addition to his own presentation, in a useful aside he was able to share some techniques for putting together eye catching presentations designed to engage the attention of the "computer" generation.

**Editorial comment** – Ironical, that the inaugural meeting of the SIG early in 2006 was at Staffordshire Fire and Rescue. An interesting point bought up then was the public perception of reduced service if a Fire Station was closed for economic reasons, even though adequate cover was provided from elsewhere.

**NB.** There is more on the role of *perception* in the Supplement.

**Next meeting 10<sup>th</sup> February 2010, so an advance date for your diary** meeting advised at the Offices of BDO Stoy Hayward at 55, Baker Street, London W1U 1EU - exact timing and directions will be confirmed later on, but provisionally this may be at the slightly later time of 5.00 PM. The topic will be:

**Ethical risk in the workplace** presented by Nigel Iyer and Mark Boulton, who have been contributors to InfoRM.

**In the future** It is hoped that a later event will expand on the concept of practical communication using the teaching aids introduced at the 14<sup>th</sup> October London meeting and this is one that is awaited with interest. Also, the SIG has not ruled out the possibility of organising an additional meeting in Central England to supplement the London programme.

## **2 of 2 - Feedback from the last issue and general NEWS update**

**A)** You will recall that the last issue dealt with the important matter of culture in the context of high management lead organisational ways being influenced or countered by views from Trade Unions and others.

A number of you made contact and a very useful observation was presented regarding the time scale being against addressing cultural/human factors. I quote one contribution:

"I think that the issue of culture and cultural shift is an interesting one. Traditionally I think that firms have had more than one culture within them. Those successful firms have been able to harness the sub culture in a way that they compliment the top down culture and progress is made. Firms that failed to achieve this have suffered, none more than those who went on an acquisition trail."

The correspondent went on to comment on the short time scales that CEOs and other senior managers, under pressure from institutional investor people, are given to turn things around – often not helpful to Human Resource programmes.

Agreed - and I noticed that this problem was around in the UK from the 1960s, so we don't appear to be able to learn from the mistakes of others - further, organisations often have more than one sub culture. In the context of fast turnaround, perhaps we could learn from the M Os of football managers! Ed

**B)** One advantage of the *NEWSLETTERS* is the international distribution – we have readers in Canada, Hong Kong, Turkey and Ukraine to our knowledge.

The SIG was very pleased to hear from one of our overseas members, Jeremy Kidner of the *irm* Regional Group in Hong Kong and it is hoped to establish closer liaison in the future through LinkedIn – thanks for getting in touch, Jeremy.

### **Editorial comment**

Hong Kong is a major financial centre. The British involvement is now only traditional, but shared culture can be helpful, your editor remembers from the 1950s as a boy the particular place allocated within UK society to the then small Hong Kong Chinese community in England, mainly restaurant owning – some would argue that Hong Kong could still be stated as "the gateway to China". In addition, nowadays many Chinese students come to this country to obtain degrees. This situation is reflected in

the introduction to the Guide, which includes a quotation from Fu Ying, Chinese Ambassador in London, which I set out below:

“Communication and Understanding can bring down all barriers” (2008)

Now China has a population of circa 1,334 million. In proportion to us in the UK, if you talk about the football comparison again the team of 11 would number over 220 and, can you imagine 300 or more people turning up for work each morning at the **irm** in Lloyd's Avenue – it is difficult to imagine how our systems could cope with so many people.

China has recently undergone its industrial revolution which has, through knock on effects of trade, changed many balances throughout the world. It will be interesting to see how the people in the country react to the downturn in Western exports in the current difficulties – will there be the unrest in China that we saw after the end of our Industrial Revolution in the UK around 1911 up to the outbreak of WWI which led to violent demonstrations on the streets and the formation of the Labour Party.

China today is probably an excellent place for practising people RM skills!

**C) Newsflash** Carolyn Williams, our liaison at the **irm**, has advised of receipt of a formal communique from the Ergonomics Society stating that from now on they wish to be known as *the Institute of Ergonomics and Human Factors*.

A quick look at their Website (not yet re-branded) includes a very helpful definition of ergonomics as:

“Scientific information concerning humans to the design of objects, systems and environment for human use”.

Indeed, this is as your editor has always understood ergonomics to be. Anyway, it is hoped that their change in title reflects the need for the *softer skills* (thanks to PB for suggesting the use of this term) to help people to accept the “scientific”. I am further advised that enquiries are in hand to see if there is room for mutual understanding.

**D) inspiration from Marsh Risk Consulting meeting** Your editor's eye was caught by an interesting article in StrategicRISK that landed on my doormat last week (November 2009 issue pages 12 and 13). The feature was reporting the Magazine's latest Question Time at Marsh's Tower Hill offices about how leading organisations are implementing ERM – I can commend the article in full to you.

One part of the report did make me smile: Panellist Stephen Roberts, one of Marsh's leading lights, was quoted as saying, “the problem with getting senior management buy-in is that risk management is often seen as a business disabler rather than an enabler” – *echos of Jeremy Clarkson there too*. Ed. Mr. Roberts is further quoted as continuing with suggesting trying to demonstrate the day-to-day applicability of risk management and packaging it as something that enables better decisions.

- not only does your editor agree with Mr. Roberts, but I would venture a stage further, **buy-in** is the ultimate prize in Risk Management - and at all levels, not just the top end.

We do not, yet, have the complete answer to this and I don't think anyone else has, either. However, it is hoped that the publication of, and other possible further developments from, our **Guide** would be a constructive step in the right direction.

### 3 of 3 Guide “pull out” Supplement – introducing the PIED PIPER

The descriptive Supplement follows after the “[and something to think about](#)” section.

The two early intentions for the Guide material, were to prepare an easy to understand and practical publication and/or expand the knowledge into an academic work. However, there is a third way:

The Guide could be ran as a Website (separate from the [irm](#) although with a link to it from the home page or other prominent position). There could be a constant updating process, not only by those running the Site, but with free “Wikipediia” style input, subject of course to close moderation. Perhaps financing could be obtained from adverts in topbars or sidebars by consultants, insurance firms, banks and the like?

I said at the opening of this issue, that this would be the last full edition for a while. I proposed and started this quest for greater understanding of communication and people issues with the [irm](#) four and a half years ago now, so I rest my initial case for now with this *NEWSLETTER* and the Supplement that follows. The floor is yours . . .

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#### ***And something to think about:***

I was recently in conversation with a lady who is known to be disposed to discussing her own and her family’s ailments in the course of social conversation-

*“. . of course I’ve got the sticky blood”*

was a phrase used in relation to her high cholesterol. A memorable depth of meaning was conveyed by the use this term -.there’s a lot to be said for the simplicity of street speak and I wonder how much organisational understanding is lost by the use of technical and “correct” terms.

Also, the exact meaning of a word can evolve, especially in a particular context (so even a dictionary can be misleading). A few years ago a phrase came from an eminent UK project management background:

#### ***“Uncertainty first, risk second”***

We all know what is meant here, but very recently there has been a tendency to see the term “uncertainty” used as an alternative for conveying threat risk, especially when anticipated as emerging. So now there could be a case for reverting to “risk and opportunity” –

that just cannot be misunderstood . . . or can it?.