

THE INSTITUTE OF SCIENTIFIC BUSINESS - A BEGINNING OR THE END?**By Professor John Fyfe****INTRODUCTION**

The 23rd August 1989 marks the 25th Anniversary of the founding of the Institute of Scientific Business. In this article I will attempt what can only be a personal view and account in respect of that history and in particular, some reflections on the 'past' taking account of the present management, education and training scene. Unfortunately many of the views expressed are personal views that are not able to be subjected to any kind of rigorous or objective tests. Indeed, the account which follows is very far from being 'scientific' or necessarily 'objective' in nature. There are several reasons for these weaknesses. Firstly, the small band of people who started the ISCB are no longer in regular communication nor do they exist as a 'team' or in any forum through which their different perspectives of the beginning can be checked or assessed in order to arrive at some generally agreed but tentative conclusions. Secondly, it follows that there were many interrelated events at the very beginnings to the Institute and its formation which have not been recorded. This means that we are filling in a jigsaw about the ISCB over a 25 year period for which there are some critical pieces missing. Nevertheless, it is possible to get some picture from that jigsaw even though 10-15% of the pieces may have been lost in the attic. Despite these weaknesses and without any apologies for the personal reflections, it may nevertheless be useful for the annals of living history to record some of the early beginnings. This is particularly important in the context of the living organism and the developing body of institutions now portrayed under the banner of the International Management Centres. There are threads which connect this living organism (which is developing at a very fast rate) back to the roots of the Institute of Scientific



Business. Although not of total linear connection and certainly not all embracing, nevertheless such roots have something to do with the current format and the hopes and aspirations for the International Management Centres in their future development.

For all these reasons I would like to make a short contribution to the celebrations for the 25th Anniversary in a way that not only looks backwards but possibly takes a forward jump in the context of the current debate about management training and development.

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This personal account will begin with reference to a letter that I wrote as a young Trade Union Official back in the June of 1965. I had just completed my research into the causes behind a number of industrial disputes within the coal industry going back over a 10 year period. Further to that research, I had taken up the post of National Research Officer and Deputy General Secretary designated for the British Association of Colliery Management. The results from that research proved to me beyond doubt that in so many of the industrial disputes the problems lay not so much in the 'bloody mindedness' of Trade Unions either through their membership or their collective bargaining procedures, but at the door of management in this country. The research had suggested to me that many of the disputes had arisen purely out of bloody awful management in British industry. This main finding had been supported by other research in Britain that had concentrated upon other industries in both the Public and the Private sectors.

These results had not been reflected in the popular press at the time. All of the popular journalism and even the supposedly better informed labour editors of the day had created impressions that somehow the British industrial relations scene was in a total mess because of the shortsightedness and the rigid nature of Trade Unions and their leadership. Clearly from the research there were grounds to support this inference in some cases, but it was only one side of the coin. In the many years since serving as a Trade Union Official this particular one-sided aspect of the situation has become all too familiar a part of this so-called informative - let alone the more popular - press and media coverage.

At the same time as this research work I had been put in touch with a certain Thomas Kempner at the Bradford School of Management. In these days the Business School was going into a new phase and things seemed to

be buzzing at that particular Business School. I sent my findings to this Professor Kempner on the advice of my mentor who was then a certain E M (Fritz) Schumaker. Thomas Kempner invited me up to Bradford and I met a number of his colleagues with whom I discussed the findings from my research. That was a most invigorating visit and it led to meeting up with individuals who themselves had been instrumental in the founding of what was to become the Institute of Scientific Business. I was pointed in the direction of one or two people who had just set up this loose gathering of those interested in looking into problems and techniques for dealing with problems in the management business.

I recall subsequently writing to people like Geoff Pitt, Peter Pope, Peter Steadman - and in particular, a certain gentleman with the name of Gordon Wills. Within weeks I found myself going to meetings of a group to which I had already been elected a Council Member. This letter, of which I have a tatty copy, was really the beginning of my association with what was to become the ISCB and which is something of an embryo for the current International Management Centres. In that tatty letter I asked the people who were forming together whether they would be including in their aims and objectives the desire to help management to improve their standards of performance as a means of removing or reducing the incidence of industrial 'Strife' in Great Britain. I use the word 'Strife' deliberately because of a subsequent part this word turned out to play in my own career development.

I had two replies to my letter. One, a long account from Geoff Pitt with a bibliography and cross referencing work in the States and Europe that would point me in the direction of management techniques that might be deployed for tackling labour relations problems. Perhaps he did not put it in that format but certain that was the gist of the response. A long thought out letter. It came some two months after the initial inquiry

but was much appreciated at that time.

By contrast I had a very short letter from Gordon Wills which came within three days of my initial inquiry. The letter simply said something to the effect that he was not sure whether he could help with the problem but would be delighted to meet me and see whether there was any common ground for looking at these kinds of problems, although he quickly pointed out in the same letter that his main interest was not in this particular field of management. It was this short letter that I also responded to quickly and before long I was in Bradford again meeting Gordon Wills for the very first time and enjoying the Yorkshire Bitter.

It was suggested that I might join this Institute and meet some of the other people that have since been classified as the 'Founding Fathers' of the IScB. Within weeks I found myself going to meetings of a Group to which I had already been elected a Council Member. The fact that total membership was something in the order of a dozen people meant it was very easy to be part of a Council at which six or seven people attended!

In these very early days between mid-1965 and 1970 I think the best way of describing the history must be in terms of a brief account of some 'key' events that took place and the topics discussed during that period.

The Minutes from our early meetings indicated that our main aims were very much in terms of seeking to help managers improve themselves in terms of their operational functions. The focus was not that different to the more refined messages associated with the action learning handle into which the International Management Centres have been slotted. I recall that the Minutes kept for each meeting of the Council reflected lengthy discussions about what the real purpose of our 'Association' should be all about. The problem in the early days was that nobody really wanted to be Secretary and therefore the Minutes were not very comprehensive. I no

longer have the original book of Minutes although I do remember looking after it for several years during the period which I took painful possession of that task. It was conspicuous by the rough notes and badly scribbled jottings for each of the meetings.

You may say not a good beginning, but on the other hand it could be said that we were more interested in the meat rather than the paper wrappings! At least that might be the excuse which the Founding Fathers - of which I am part - might wish to use for covering up the fact that none of us really wanted to be landed with the task of keeping the Minutes.

In these very early days the Council Meetings were in fact a forum for each of us as individuals to raise all sorts of issues associated with our jobs. Some members were from industry - some from academia - and I found myself alone from the Trade Union movement. Nevertheless, a reasonable mixture of the different interests that are always to be found somewhere lurking behind management issues even in 1989!

The Minutes recall special meetings on some of these topics and perhaps I could give a flavour of the topics which themselves form the basis for these 'Special' meetings. The only reason for us introducing the term 'Special' meetings was to give each member time to think a bit about the topic and wherever possible to invite others along who had something to offer or who themselves were interested in the particular problem being discussed.

The special topics includes the following:-

- 'Understanding these new computers'
- 'Automation in British Industry'
- 'Developments in Financial Management and Accounting'
- 'The Personnel Function for the 1970s'

'Marketing products and services'
'The Management of Change in British Industry'

and finally, one of the special topics was simply entitled 'Having to deal with Government'.

By the end of 1969 and certainly at a 'Special' Council Meeting of September 1969 we were beginning to talk about how we might structure the Institute and move into the 1970's with clearer aims and objectives. At that same Council Meeting we also spent many hours considering what we might do to improve our membership base and to have a bigger voice in the world at large. At this time our notion of the 'world at large' was very much something to do with our own British back garden and I would make no apologies for the fact that most of us were heavily involved with microcosms of change in the British context.

Arising out of that September Council Meeting we actually started to produce things in writing in a more professional format. A journal was initiated and began to take on a role for anyone who wished to contribute in the field of management and development. Secondly, we spelt out exactly what the Institute should be aiming to do in terms of its aims and objectives. A little brochure was produced which spelt out specific things that started to make the Institute feel towards the notion of becoming a professional body with a real future in store.

Into these aims and objectives crept a number of phrases that showed we had great vision or perhaps more correctly great expectations for the future. We were offering membership to people from the 'United States, Canada and the Continent of Europe'! Secondly, we were aiming to create and develop a recognised profession for managers with a scientific foundation and with accepted standards of qualifications and of ethics! This idea has now been taken up again recently by the British Institute of

Management. Thirdly, we were to commit ourselves to improving communications and the interchange of ideas throughout the so-called growing body of people educated to appreciate this broad field of management. Fourthly, we were going to try and encourage all levels of management to understand and apply these new ideas and techniques and to use them in practical situations. Finally, we were going to play our part in organising and encouraging research, group study, conferences and all other means at our disposal to encourage the growth and development of more professional standards in the business of management and development.

I suppose an objective or rather a more substantive account of the Institute and its role would begin by setting out these objectives and testing whether and how any of these aims were achieved in practice.

I am not in the position nor indeed in the business for carrying out that kind of research. In any case I am not sure what it would achieve.

What I can do is to give an account of what we did after this new beginning and especially at the end of 1969 and into the early seventies. That account is not definitive or fully comprehensive but again it will give a flavour of how we actually tried to tackle some of these aims. That in itself is yet another way of accounting for some of the historical perspectives to the Institute.

The 'Special' meetings continued and often followed on from Council Meetings. John Speaks gave a lot of time and effort in the area of financial management and coming to grips with the problems of managing change. He spent many hours explaining his experiences and trying to share his learning with other members of the Institute. Ifan Hughes spent many hours sharing his early experiences with the introduction of computers. Michael O'Donnal used to give us very refreshing accounts of what now we might dress up as Operational Factory Management. He was

very interested in the very logistics of moving equipment and resources so that they were in the right place at the right time and he often used to remind us that it was not only people that mattered but resources in the context of change. David Ashton used to philosophise - and I do not mean that unkindly - about how all this might come together in relation to other situations and problems yet to be faced. Charles Magerison came and talked about management structures and motivating people for change. Gordon Wills used to take sessions on how to adapt to change and the adoption of appropriate marketing strategies for change. On occasions I used to contribute with information and learning experiences from the Trade Union side.

At that same time - (we are talking about the end of 1969) - we then had another entry to our very early fraternity! A certain Barrie Pettman was beginning to introduce his Yorkshire 'bluntness' into the discourse. There were the philosophers amongst the group - the practitioners who would think about the problems - those who agonised but didn't actually carry responsibility for such problems - and the pragmatists amongst which Barrie Pettman provided leadership not only to the ISCB but surely also to Harold Wilson in his Premiership!

It should also be said that we were also having our early introduction to the problems of rationalisation in the coal industry and there were real implications for management in a more general perspective. Not only - by chance - had I come into the group from a Trade Union perspective in the coal industry, but at the same time a certain gentleman by the name of Reginald Revans had given many tablets of stone to the coal industry which had not properly been digested. Some of these very early tablets of stone were available to the coal industry and I had been fortunate enough in having access to some of them which were entered into the ISCB and its business at a very early stage in the history.

There was never any expectation or anticipation about the ultimate significance of that 'by chance' association. It would be possible to make something of it but the truth of the matter is it was a coincidental linkage at that time.

With the development of the Institute and the wider exposure of Professor Revans and his thinking, of course it was impossible for the Institute not to be affected by Professor Revans and his writings on action learning.

At the same time, however, there was another person who was very special to my learning process and also from the coal industry. This 'Guru' had urged me to think from basic principles insofar as the management problems in the coal industry were concerned. This particular gentleman was of course the late E M (Fritz) Schummaker. Both of these gentlemen were members of my Trade Union - Membership Nos. 17064 and 19121 respectively!

Never the twain shall meet and never should there be any symmetry between the numerical associations! The greatest of thinkers may not always be on the 'same' wavelength at the 'same' time but my goodness their respective 'seeds' have certainly borne fruit in the years that have since passed. Turning back from these influences at the turn of the 1970's, a second set of reflections must relate to The Journal - The Management Decision. It would be more appropriate for Gordon Wills, another 'innovator' and then Barrie Pettman, the 'achiever' to describe that chapter of events. However, it was our Yorkshire Havana Cigar smoking colleague - and my best friend - who really took up the gauntlet of this vehicle and 'how' The Journal 'grew' and 'grew'. Indeed, one might say it 'outgrew' the very Institute of its bidding.

I would limit myself to saying that the early editions of The Journal had so much to say but the invaluable experiences, the research, the practical lessons, etc. were simply not getting through to a very wide audience -

let alone an audience that had any influence in the business associated with the management of change. That as a Institute we wanted to recognise the fact that management itself was not just something done through the staff. Barrie Pettman almost single-handedly changed all of that. He actually took leaves out of the Gordon Mills marketing book and translated the notions of marketing into practice and made the journal what it is today - and that is a story and a history in its own right. The Yorkshireman with the pragmatic stance of the late sixties had shown by the middle of the 1970's that actions 'do' speak louder than words - in the end. This man of few words had actually converted Management Decision into a major vehicle for implementing the very core aims of the IScB.

It might be appropriate at this stage to suggest that in fact the same journal with the same engine room continues to perform a similar function for the International Management Centres and the lessons learnt from that experience now constitute a very healthy resource base entitled MCB Press. No further comment because this whole story is a history in its own right - however, it was important to show the association of that development with the very early days and the growth pains of the Institute at the centre.

A third development in the seventies was our attempt to structure the 'grades' associated with membership of the Institute. Our very first attempt in 1971 to spell out precisely the actual educational requirements and types of experiences required in order to 'qualify' for the appropriate grade of membership in the Institute. We had countless meetings and arguments on this issue. We had no desire to be 'elitist' and to keep people out of the Institute. Indeed we were desperate for membership growth to continue and that was partly to do with our finances which were always so limited in terms of being able to support our

principal aims and objectives. However, at the same time we wished the grades to reflect the fact that as a Institute we wanted to recognise the fact that management itself was not just something done through the seat of one's pants, but itself was an area of operation that commanded recognised attributes. Not an easy path to tread. A paradox that in fact is at the heart of what IMCB stands for today. The balance between 'qualifications' as opposed to 'learning experiences' and the relevance of each for achieving both 'recognition' and the desired objectives in business development. This paradox not only lies at the heart at some of the conflicts facing IMC today in its dealings with different parts of the 'Establishment', but it also led to the most heated exchanges and differences of opinion ever encountered within the core of our Institute as it was in those early days.

Nevertheless, the Council decided to proceed with its attempt at classifying as a means of trying to raise the 'standards' and professional 'recognition' given to 'management' as a professional body in 'Britain'. Again, I say 'Britain' not because we were unaware of the international perspective nor because we were not interested in that perspective, but because at that stage the focus still remained very within the British network.

The next landmark in our history, I believe, was the 10th Anniversary celebrations of 1973. The principal way of celebrating this was through a Conference held in Sorrento in the February of that year. This Conference was in fact a very special event. It was the first time as an Institute that we had done anything outside of the British coastline. Secondly, we had never felt it possible - or perhaps we did not have the courage - to organise something involving 'risk' as a factor in our own operations. Thirdly, we had certainly not ventured beyond sitting rooms, lounges, University seminar rooms, the odd hotel bar or I could mention other even less salubrious venues. However, here we were in the February

of 1973 at a grand hotel in a palatial setting about to look ahead to the future and 'quality' was our business.

The contributions made at that first very 'Special' International Conference were again interesting from a historical standpoint in view of the water that has passed under the bridge in the last 15 years. We had Professor Cunningham telling us about international business developments. Michael O'Donnal making his experiences on Operational Management at the factory level respectable. We had Ifan Hughes who had moved from introducing computers for the first time towards the more respectable title of the Management of Information Systems. We had David Ashton telling us about Corporate Strategies for the 1980's - and that was only in the February of 1973. We had Geoff Pitt re-writing some of his thoughts on management education and the implications for the 80's. And then Barrie Pettman and I doing our 'duo act' on people and people planning with an eye on the 1980's but followed by Charles Magerison explaining how to handle people and the notions of inter-personal problem solving. Underlining those papers we had Gordon Wills underpinning the contributions by reminding us all that without a market and due attention to marketing many of the institutions and therefore the refined problems associated with inter-personal skills, people planning, information systems, would not exist in the first place.

Indeed, upon reflection, I remember that perhaps to me as a participant, the most important outcome from the Conference was at the end when we were discussing issues to do with priorities and what at that stage seemed to be a new concept of 'Time' Management. It may seem fallacious to say that on the last day of the Conference there was a concensus which said something like - 'all situations are unique, but within these different situations managers have to pick out priorities and seek to allocate their time and efforts accordingly'. Gobbledegook perhaps, but it's a paraphrase of what my notes tell me from that venue of February 1973.

This 'gobbledegook' on 'Time' Management was to become an honourable new 'phrase' in management thinking for the 1980's.

Moving into the 70's and beyond this very special Conference I suppose we could say that the period after 1975 introduced the beginning of the decline or even the 'death' of the Institute.

We moved to a period when in fact the Institute had been overtaken by events and a surge of interest in management, education, training, Government investigations etc. It could also be said that the Institute was not about to die but in some ways to be re-born. In other words, the Institute was to take on different clothing which would make the Institute unrecognisable in the future. With the development of the International Management Centre from Buckingham and the growth of MCB as an organisation one could almost suggest that the IScB had been cocooned - if not buried in the sand. Much depends upon the view that one takes of this development.

Personally, I prefer to think that the Institute had been cocooned and that the caterpillar had emerged as something of a moth - if not a butterfly - and that somewhere in that moth are signs or markings that reflect the early beginnings of the Institute of Scientific Business.

The above account is a very personalised one of the early beginnings and the development of the Institute into the seventies. As I warned at the beginning it also has pieces of the jigsaw missing and interpretations that may not be shared even by those who were part of the early beginnings. Perhaps I can now say a word about the sources of my material for the above perspective and finally one or two points, as I believe they relate to the next 25 years in the development of 'management' and the process of change in all organisations within both public and the private sectors.

The Institute itself was based upon a coming together from a number of 'people' who had a mutual interest in trying to help each other understand and secondly to solve problems being faced up to within their very different organisations. The source of material for my deductions and commentary in fact reflects a wealth of correspondence that I myself conducted with many of the Founders within the IScB. That correspondence is something which I treasure to this day. Secondly, there were Minutes of our early Council Meetings and the notes taken of the 'Special' Meetings and Conferences. Some of those I retained as copies where I had originally written the main draft. Some of the photocopies are blurred but nevertheless an invaluable source for looking back in time. Thirdly, I have kept very detailed diaries from each of the years across the history of the Institute. Again, by searching the entries I have picked out points which stuck in my mind as being important at that time, but of course these can only be my own personal interpretations with all their deficiencies. Fourthly, I looked into the early editions of Management Decision which are a permanent record in some ways, although there had not always been any association between The Journal and the Institute. Fifthly, it was possible to find a number of ad hoc papers, notebooks, and jottings of individual events throughout the early years and especially for the 1965-75 period insofar as the Institute was concerned.

The source material has its weaknesses and maybe somewhat lacking in format. However, I do believe that some of the 'snippets' above and the 'reflections' may give food for thought in terms of the present day situation of which the IMC is an important part. Furthermore, I believe that by sharing our perspective of the past we may be able to throw just a little bit of light onto the future. At the very least it will be of interest to compare the type of issues discussed and causing concern within the Institute during the period 1964-75! However, I do believe in a more positive way that some of the contributions made by the Founding

Fathers of the Institute have not been recognised for their true 'pioneering' values. Whilst some of the Founding Fathers in the Institute have become international figures and famous for their research, writings and advice on management topics, there are others from the very beginnings who have not had the same acclaim. Some of the people I have mentioned in this article were true pioneers not only of the Institute but of the current thinking in management training and development. Apart from the fact that they persisted with a body that helped to form the International Management Centres and what they stand for today, some of them also contributed in a way that saw their fruits becoming fertiliser rather than seeds for the future. However, fertiliser is an important component for the seeds if they are to grow into a healthy body of substance.

Perhaps I can single out one aspect from the very early days which I believe epitomises the fact that the IMC butterfly does have some of the markings which belong to the IScB caterpillar. It lies in this very question of management training and development and whether the development of good managers is to do with formal qualifications and their recognition or more closely associated with the harnessing of experiences from the real world. It may be that Professor Revans will go down in history as a pioneer in the notion of action learning and the critical questions it raised in respect of the more traditional University based Business Schools. However, the Institute of Scientific Business had also made its contribution to the development of professional managers in both the public and private sectors endeavouring to improve their performance and to achieve professional standards that were based on learning experiences not only from their own situations but through sharing with others. The Institute of Scientific Business played its full part - at a very early stage - in that process and the very legitimisation of harnessing learning experiences for the purpose of tackling the practical problems associated with the management of change.

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In this one area I believe the early Founders of the Institute have made a very real contribution even although their efforts have gone somewhat unrecognised in the time that has passed since those early days. However, it is not always the best wine that is to be found in the bottles with the most attractive labels! Indeed some of the very best wine is lost for many years and only savoured by future generations long after the grape pickers are dead and buried.

I would like, therefore, to add these reflections to the special contributions made on the history of the Institute in a way that not only looks backwards but takes one or two of the issues into the future. Therefore I would dedicate this personalised account of the early days to the Founders of the Institute who will probably remain anonymous despite their early contributions to the very notions that the International Management Centres stand for today. Finally, in that tribute and dedication to the early pioneers I am sure I would speak for most of them when I say that the wine will be sweet and there would be no sour grapes from the point of view of the Institute having moved out of its catalyst into not one but several butterflies of the International Management Centre variety. It is fitting, therefore, that in paying this tribute to the past, and the pioneers of the past, that I end with a toast to the future of the International Management Centres - from the very best of our wine bottled on the 23rd August 1964.