

Institute of Management Services

56th Annual General Meeting, Friday 8th October 2021

President's Update

Prof Colin Coulson-Thomas*

In this year's update I will quickly summarise some of the ambassadorial activities I have undertaken to increase awareness of the institute, before sharing my understanding of contemporary issues that we need to collectively address.

My 49 publications during the year included 18 quarterly or monthly professional journal articles and three peer-reviewed academic journal articles. It is a sign of the times that almost a half of the total or 24 items were articles or talks published on-line.

My speaking activities during the year included guest lectures and keynotes, or a special address, at four global webinars and a plenary talk on improving productivity and performance during a global productivity discourse.

I provided concluding remarks or recommendations, or acted as the moderator of the question and answer session, of other international events. At an annual CSR leadership conference I was both the chief guest and the opening keynote speaker.

Wherever possible, and particularly when writing quarterly journal articles and speaking, I refer to my institute role, and this appears at the start of my biography or on the programme.

I continue to serve on four editorial or editorial advisory boards and have professorial, governance, leadership and other roles in the UK and overseas. These help me to remain current and engaged. As professionals, we have an obligation to stay up to date.

Since its origin, our institute and its members have been particularly concerned with labour productivity, which continues to be a challenge in some areas of the public and private sectors. This is particularly so in the UK which continues to lag behind some other countries.

We currently have a relatively high level of unfilled vacancies, a low unemployment rate in relation to the challenges we have been through, and a reduced flow of labour from the EU. This suggests we still need to focus on increasing labour productivity, being economical, effective and efficient in our use of labour, and also upskill and reskill.

Our community has a vital role to play in addressing skills gaps, levelling up and moving ahead. The institute could make an important contribution to the creation of a higher skilled and higher paid economy.

Young people today face particular challenges. Our new qualifications offer a relatively quick and good return in terms of increased employability and/or potential contribution and payback to sponsoring employers. We offer competence based complements and/or supplements to academic qualifications.

Younger people who work for and obtain our qualifications can immediately contribute and benefit their employers and/or clients. For older people, they could represent an update or refresh. They might also provide a focus or enable them to change direction.

I hope all members will do their best to bring our new qualifications to the attention of all those who could benefit from them. We can all be IMS ambassadors and advocates.

Businesses need practical problem solvers. They require people with imagination and drive who can assume responsibility. Rather than dependents, employers may increasingly look for partners who create new possibilities, provide preferable options and develop better alternatives.

We also need more innovative applications of AI and digital and other technologies, and the wider adoption of new business, operating and organisational models and new patterns of work. Our members are well placed to evaluate options and assess changes.

Human activities continue to over-exploit natural capital. Each year we use twice the amount that would be sustainable. Material productivity or output per unit of material input has been stagnant in recent years. We also need to be more economical, effective and efficient in our use of natural capital.

We need to consider how our experience and insights could enable organisations to reduce their consumption of natural capital, especially that which is becoming increasingly scarce. More of our members might consider applying, adapting or developing approaches, tools and techniques for increasing material productivity?

Consequences follow from the lifestyles, aspirations and priorities of the communities and societies in which we operate. They often desire rates of economic growth and levels of consumption that our planet cannot support.

Traditional growth strategies are not sustainable. If levelling up is not to be replaced with holding back, we need to make every effort to decouple economic growth from adverse environmental consequences.

The collective impact of far too many existing activities is polluting the oceans, degrading the environment and destroying eco-systems. The consequences of current contemporary lifestyles and business operations are reducing biodiversity, over-exploiting natural capital and contributing to global warming and climate change.

The negative impacts of human activity are afflicting people around the world. Even a monastery on the top of a mountain could be affected as more people seek solace. Today wildfires, floods, droughts and crop failures increasingly occur in multiple locations.

Scientific consensus suggests the situation may get worse before it improves. Unexpected events and disruptions should now be regarded as par for the course.

As a profession and as individual professionals we should be alert to evolving aspirations and preferences and aware of changing requirements and priorities. Others might expect us to use our knowledge and skills to help mankind address certain shared and existential challenges.

Cherished infrastructure may have to be written off as temperatures and sea levels rise, low lying areas are inundated and regions are abandoned due to shortages of water and food. We face unprecedented disruption and mass migrations of people.

When the first bodies that would later merge to form our institute were founded, our earliest members faced great challenges. During a period of world war they rose to the occasion. They did their bit and played their part at a time when every contribution was welcome.

Today we are engaged in a global struggle for survival. We can all participate in individual and collective activities to confront the shared existential challenges we face. Alongside them, there are also unprecedented opportunities:

Opportunities to help people to review, re-purpose, re-invent and change direction;

Opportunities to support them during transitions and transformation journeys to more sustainable and inclusive business and operating models;

Opportunities to: inspire creativity and be creative, encourage innovation and be innovative, and support entrepreneurship and be entrepreneurial.

Recent events have demonstrated the fragility of global supply chains. Disruption, discontinuities and disasters could become more frequent and widespread. There are also opportunities to help with contingencies, recovery arrangements and back-up strategies.

In all these areas, whether working alone or with others, there may be opportunities for IMS Measurement Practitioners, IMS Productivity Analysts and different levels of IMS membership.

Our members may find opportunities for involvement in multi-organisational teams and collective activities as supply chain and collaborative responses are explored, implemented and operated.

With so many possibilities and people needing to adopt more sustainable lifestyles, one need never be too old to seize opportunities to advise, coach, mentor or otherwise help others.

As more people are affected or become alert to present dangers, risks and existential threats, an alignment of corporate, individual, community and societal interests behind the shared objective of addressing climate change may occur.

Professionals and their bodies have an emerging opportunity to join coalitions of people and organisations in support of effective collective action. Many of them would benefit from greater awareness of the practical value of our qualifications and our potential contribution.

Our participation in individual and collective action to address challenges and seize opportunities could increase the demand for the services of our institute and its members. As practitioners we and our institute need to be ready to seize the moment.

There are opportunities for volunteers to step forward to help the future development of the institute. We have survived Covid-19 due to the dedication of our active members, and particularly those mentioned by the chairman in his report.

The work of our institute and the services it provides greatly benefit from voluntary effort. This ranges from assuming the responsibilities of a Council member, or organising activities and services for members, to contributing to our quarterly journal Management Services.

Echoing the chairman's comments and on your behalf, I would like to thank him, Council members and all those who contribute their time for the benefit of us all. Some of them are with us today. We have a huge debt of gratitude to them. Thank you.

*Prof Colin Coulson-Thomas is President of the Institute of Management Services and an experienced chairman, consultant and vision holder of successful transformation programmes. He has served on a variety of governing bodies in the private, public, professional and voluntary sectors, including as chairman and president and has held professorial roles in the Americas, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, India and China. He currently holds a portfolio of international leadership and professorial roles and has advised over 100 boards on improving director, board and corporate performance.. Details of his most recent books and reports can be found on: <http://www.policypublications.com/>

