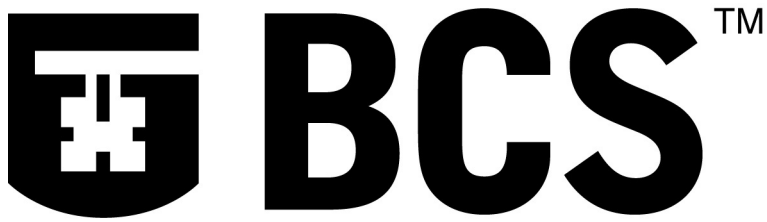# Report from the British Computer Society
Heath Informatics (London & South East) Specialist Group

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THE BRITISH COMPUTER SOCIETY

Editorial

This is the first all electronic replacement for the Group's Newsletter. I have made it look rather like a Newsletter so that it can be printed and kept by anyone who wants to. Otherwise, it is headed as a Report because we will tend to produce one of these individually for each significant item arising from the Group's events.

In the March 2004 Newsletter, I noted that I had been to a meeting at the Central London Branch, entitled "Is Your Big IT Programme Going to Deliver". That presentation was by the French Thornton Partnership. I remember wondering what differences there really are between project management and programme management, other than mere scale.

Our group met on 29th September and heard a presentation which, I think, more clearly articulated the differences.

The slides from the talk (approx 3MB) are available separately on the group website, and the speaker may be contacted directly at
www.pearcemayfield.com

Mark Buckley-Sharp

Meeting Report
Wednesday 22nd September 2004
Managing Successful Programmes

Patrick Mayfield is a consultant with a method, and that method is called Managing Successful Programmes (MSP). MSP was commissioned by the Cabinet Office, and is accredited like PRINCE2.

NpfIT is supposedly run on MSP lines, although one could question whether that is apparent in every aspect of NpfIT activity.

The NHS is an extremely complex environment, where there is debate about whether it does or does not need more management, more bureaucracy, more targets or more hoops to jump through to demonstrate effective performance. Programme management is a discipline which respects complexity, and is adaptive to it. It maps the territory, attempting to understand the chaos and engage the people.

PRINCE project management (PPM) is a respectable discipline, but there are concerns when projects fail despite apparently good controls. MSP is less prescriptive than PPM.

Organisations with poor or absent Programme management have collections of inherited projects; unaligned initiatives; and seek to achieve outcomes which never had or which no longer have any apparent organisational benefits. Projects may deliver their own objectives but without ensuring transition to change: they have a ragged outcome. Likewise, projects may actually be too strong within their

boundaries to be controllable in a wider interest.

Types of change can be categorised

	Don't know how	Do know how
Don't know what	'Walking in a Fog'	'Making a Movie'
Do know what	'On a Quest'	'Paint by Numbers

[source: Eddie Obeng. "All Change! The Project Leader's Secret Handbook]

If the change is in a Fog, then change itself is difficult and cannot be forced. The art is to stay in close communication with the rest of the team.

Technology driven change is an example of not knowing what to do while having the means to do something. Change can still occur, but it may be dangerous and unlikely to deliver real benefits.

In a Quest, the need is to search, communicate and define. A solved Quest should become 'Paint by Numbers'.

The full features of MSP require an extensive course, but briefly include Topics, Processes, and of course Documents.

[At this point, Patrick took a secret opinion poll of the audience's strategic vision of NpfIT. Let's just say that there was quite a variety.]

There has to be a definition of a Programme. Vision is vital, and this needs to be set out in a blueprint, justified by a business case, and then identifying a portfolio of projects, benefits, and relevant stakeholders.

Leadership for a Programme has to be deeply embedded into the organisation. While competence in running projects has to be available, the Programme will not create lasting change unless a full range of operational management is involved.

With respect to benefits strategy, it is interesting that the public sector tends to drive for financial benefit, while the private sector has moved on to drive for non-financial benefits such as competencies and customer care.

As a Programme may be a long process, it is desirable to have intermediate benefits. But, in any case, every part of the Programme must be mapped to the expected benefits, mainly to make sure that each part of the Programme is really required, and that no benefits are going to be missed out through Programme defects. Driving the Programme from the benefits end makes it more efficient and more effective.

There is a continuum from Projects to Programmes, and not a sharp line between them. But, typically, a Project is more self-contained and single minded, while a Programme sets out primarily to recognise variety, and adapt to it.

To manage successful programmes, there are some conditions which enhance the likelihood of success. A good programme:

- Has coordinated projects which are started, stopped and otherwise controlled to meet the programme vision.

- Shows effective transition from project outcome to operations.

- Focuses strongly on benefits.

- Looks for risks and keeps them under review and control.

- Has a clear and consistent vision which is sustainable beyond changing circumstances.

All of these conditions have to be met for a successful Programme. To meet then all requires a competence in every essential area.

[The meeting then moved into audience questions (Q), answers (A) and comments (C).]

Q: Has NpfIT really managed its stakeholders at the level of Trusts and clinicians? **A:** Whatever your views on this, NpfIT has at least succeeded in a procurement where all previous attempts had made absolutely no progress.

Q: Can NpfIT survive the short termism of political drivers? **A:** Programme management is a discipline which is primarily intended to flex against all drivers, and take relevant action.

C: In a large organisation, there may have to be either parallel Programmes or hierarchies of Programmes. Doing only one at a time may be too limiting.

C: Programmes are not all the same size. They can vary in scope, but the vision for each still needs to be consistent.

C: Does NpfIT have a perverse driver where an LSP must implement common solutions regardless of the users? Has it succeeded so far only by ignoring a major stakeholder group?