



DISCUSSION SESSION PAPER

Session 7: Challenging management conventions in business and government, with practical presentations from two experts

Part 2: John Seddon, Vanguard and visiting professor at the LERC, Cardiff University

Vanguard... systems thinking for service organisations

Vanguard helps organisations change from command and control to a systems approach to the design and management of work.

The consequences are improved service to customers, at lower costs and improved morale.

Vanguard has pioneered the translation of Taiichi Ohno's ideas behind the Toyota Production System for service organisations. Service is different to manufacturing. In simple terms there is inherently greater variety in customer demand, hence the need to design to absorb that variety. We recommend that service organisations avoid the 'tools' developed for 'lean manufacturing' as they don't apply well in service organisations.

Vanguard has a unique approach to consulting. The Vanguard Method transfers expertise to people (managers and staff) in the organisation. Vanguard uses sensei to apply the Method, people who are experts in both intervention theory (how you make a change) and systems theory (how to analyse and design work). Vanguard senseis are experts in the 'what': how a systems design improves performance and the 'how':

About Vanguard

Vanguard formed in 1984. In our early years we were engaged in research on the reasons for change programmes failing. We were strongly influenced by the work of W. Edwards Deming and Peter Senge on organisations as systems. We were also concerned with the 'how' of change and borrowed ideas and methods from intervention theory.

Today, we describe our work as a combination of systems thinking - 'how the work works' - and intervention theory - 'how to change it'.

Vanguard's clients include many well-known names in the UK and Europe.

Vanguard is the consultants' consultancy. In recent times, Vanguard has been engaged by larger consulting organisations who are interested in applying our methods.

About Professor Seddon

John Seddon is an occupational psychologist and management thinker credited with translating the Toyota Production System (TPS) for service organisations.

John began his career researching the reasons for failures of major change programmes. This led him to W. Edwards Deming, whom John credits with introducing him to the importance of understanding and managing organisations as systems and Taiichi Ohno who showed the practicality and power of doing so in manufacturing. The economic performance of the TPS is

legendary. John has translated the principles behind the TPS for service organisations. In service organisations change can be much faster than in manufacturing, but managers firstly have to be prepared to change the way they think.

In his time John has been a leading critic of management fads, in particular ISO 9000, which he describes as being based on bad theory. Most of his criticisms of management and their fads are based on his view that it is management thinking that needs to change. John has been an ardent critic of the government's approach to public sector reform, in particular the adverse consequences of targets and specifications. These, he says, are components of the 'command and control' philosophy which, he argues, is a failing management paradigm. John proposes instead managers learn to adopt a systems perspective.

John is a visiting professor at the Lean Enterprise Research Centre, University of Cardiff. He is an entertaining, controversial and informed speaker. John's book ("Freedom from Command and Control") and other publications are available from the Vanguard web site: www.systemsthinking.co.uk, or direct from Vanguard, Villiers House, 1, Nelson Street, Buckingham MK18 1BU.

More information

For more information on Vanguard, its services, articles by John Seddon etc, see:

<http://www.lean-service.com/home.asp>