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British Standards: a personal view

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Bill's personal view on the suite of British Standards on Design Management.

The Original Design Management Standard

It all started back in 1985. IED member Geoffrey Constable was then employed at the Design Council and he had the idea that there ought to be a British Standard on Design Management. The idea was widely publicised and at the first meeting there were sixteen committee members led by Geoffrey, who announced that the new standard would be numbered BS 7000. There were designers from all corners of our profession from we engineers through to fashion designers. It soon became obvious that all branches of our profession could not be covered in one standard so the focus became product design.

When Geoffrey suggested that we all wrote down our definition of 'design' and from the 16 sitting round the table came 16 quite different definitions. So quite early on in the proceedings there was an attempt to provide a standard of definitions used in design management. This eventually became BS 7000-10 Glossary of terms used in design management (the BSI editorial requirements now use the term 'vocabulary' in place of 'glossary') and was published in 1995.

Another far more important area of discussion was what type of standard BS 7000 would be. There are 'specification' standards and 'guides'. The former are like the recipe for petrol – they must be followed and anything that does not conform to that standard is not allowed. The requirement to conform to a specification standard can be part of a contract. The guides are more like 'advice' – 'we believe that this is the way you ought to do this (current best practice) but we can't make you do it'. The world's first standard on the topic and entitled 'Guide to Managing Product Design' was published in 1989

All standards go through several stages including the 'draft for public comment' (DPC). The DPC allows anybody to comment on the contents of any standard before it is published and these comments are all compiled and discussed often resulting in changes. Are you having your say?

A Suite of Standards

It was not long after this that it was proposed that the range ought to be extended to include Part 4: Guide to managing design in construction, published in 1996; Part 2: Guide to managing the design of manufactured products, published in 1997; Part 3 Guide the managing service design. published in 1994. With these sector standards the original standard became BS 7000 – 1 but was eventually discontinued in 1997 whilst the last of the sector standards was being developed.

The Consultancy Drafting Scheme (CDS) is used by the BSI and funded by the (then) DTI. In this, open tenders for the work are put out along with the specification for the standard. Those who bid are assessed and the successful bidder(s) are then given a set time in which to do any necessary research and to provide the draft standard. This is then assessed by a steering committee who may request changes or further work. The draft then goes out for public comment following the same path as any committee written standard. The advantage of the FCS is that is faster than a committee developed standard but it is more expensive.

Over the years the suite has been increased to include BS 7000 -5: Guide to managing obsolescence, BS 7000 – 6: Managing inclusive design. And a new guide BS 7000-1 Guide to Managing Innovation was published in 1999. This latter standard was written because it was felt that British business was not planning their designs sufficiently far ahead and was developed through the Consultancy Drafting Scheme. The brief for the innovation guide was ‘how to design the product generation after the product generation after next’ – typically, what one should do now to plan for new products ten years ahead. The title of the standard doesn’t really state what the standard is trying to do.

Updated Standards Newly Published

Three new standards from the CDS have just been published. These are the updated BS7000 parts 1, 2 and 10. The proposals for each of these were approved in November 2006 and they have now been through all of the standards development and drafting stages including the drafts for public comment and the subsequent changes emanating from these.

Compiling each of these standards included some research of the types of companies that are at the forefront of the topic so that the standard includes the latest ‘thinking’ in that area. This can be a problem as those involved are relying on the goodwill of managers in relevant companies to assist by giving up their time without payment to be interviewed and to comment on the draft standards. The update of Part 10 was done with a lot more research of practitioners than the original standard and an article about the writing of this standard was published in Engineering Designer (May/June 2007) called ‘What's in a Name?’ The structure of this standard conforms to BS0. The standard is a glossary of words used in design management shown in alphabetical order. Next to each word is a letter that indicates where in the design process it is most likely to be used.

With the new suite of standards, BSI took the interesting measure of issuing the DPC s as a free download from their website. This new excellent new move means that the drafts are more widely available and it is hoped that the returning comment will be more thorough.

Are Standards Unfriendly?

All standards have to conform to BS0 – the ‘Standard for Standards’ and is a double edged sword. This ensures that all standards are produced to a similar format so if one is familiar with the structure of one, then they will be able to find their way through any. On the other hand, the ‘style’ can be considered unapproachable and unfriendly. It is clear that some people are put off by the ‘boring’ appearance and presentation of standards. In the past, this is one of the reasons why the Design Council have never promoted British Standards in their literature – which seems odd as they are both funded by the same government body but steps are being taken to rectify this. Another complaint that has been levelled over the years has been the poor marketing of standards. Until recently it seemed that, in most cases, all the promotion consisted of was a write up in BSI News. This preaching to the converted meant that the message of the standards often did not reach those who were likely to be the main users. This now seems to be changing as the marketing department of BSI endeavour to reach a wider audience.

Use Them

It should be remembered that British Standards are written by experts and vetted by more experts and potential users before they are published. You can be sure that when they are published, they represent the state of the art and should be used as an expert knowledge base source.

One day conference

There will be a one day conference on managing innovation to be held on 2nd April. This conference will include:

- Whether you need to innovate
- How the Government is supporting innovation
- How to effectively manage the innovation process – a detailed guide to the new Standard
- The special requirements when managing innovation for
 - Products
 - Services
 - Processes
- Best practice in environmental and sustainable innovation management
- How the key principles of BS 7000-1:2008 could work in your organization to improve innovation management and generate better returns.
- BS 7000-2, *Design management systems – Guide to managing the design of manufactured products*
- BS 7000-3, *Design management systems – Guide to managing service design*
- BS 7000-6, *Design management systems – Guide to managing inclusive design*
- The rise in importance of services – even to those employed in manufacturing
 - The difference between product design management and service design management
 - Why terminology is important in design management

The suite of design management standards

- *Part 1: Design management systems – Guide to managing innovation*
- *Part 2: Design management systems - Guide to managing the design of manufactured products*
- *Part 3: Design management systems – Guide to managing the design of services*
- *Part 4: Design management systems – Guide to managing the design in construction*
- *Part 5: Design management systems – Guide to managing obsolescence*
- *Part 6: Design management systems – Managing inclusive design - Guide*
- *Part 10: Design management systems – Glossary of terms used in design management*

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