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A standard to stop a potential financial disaster for UK's sporting ambitions

Bill Hollins

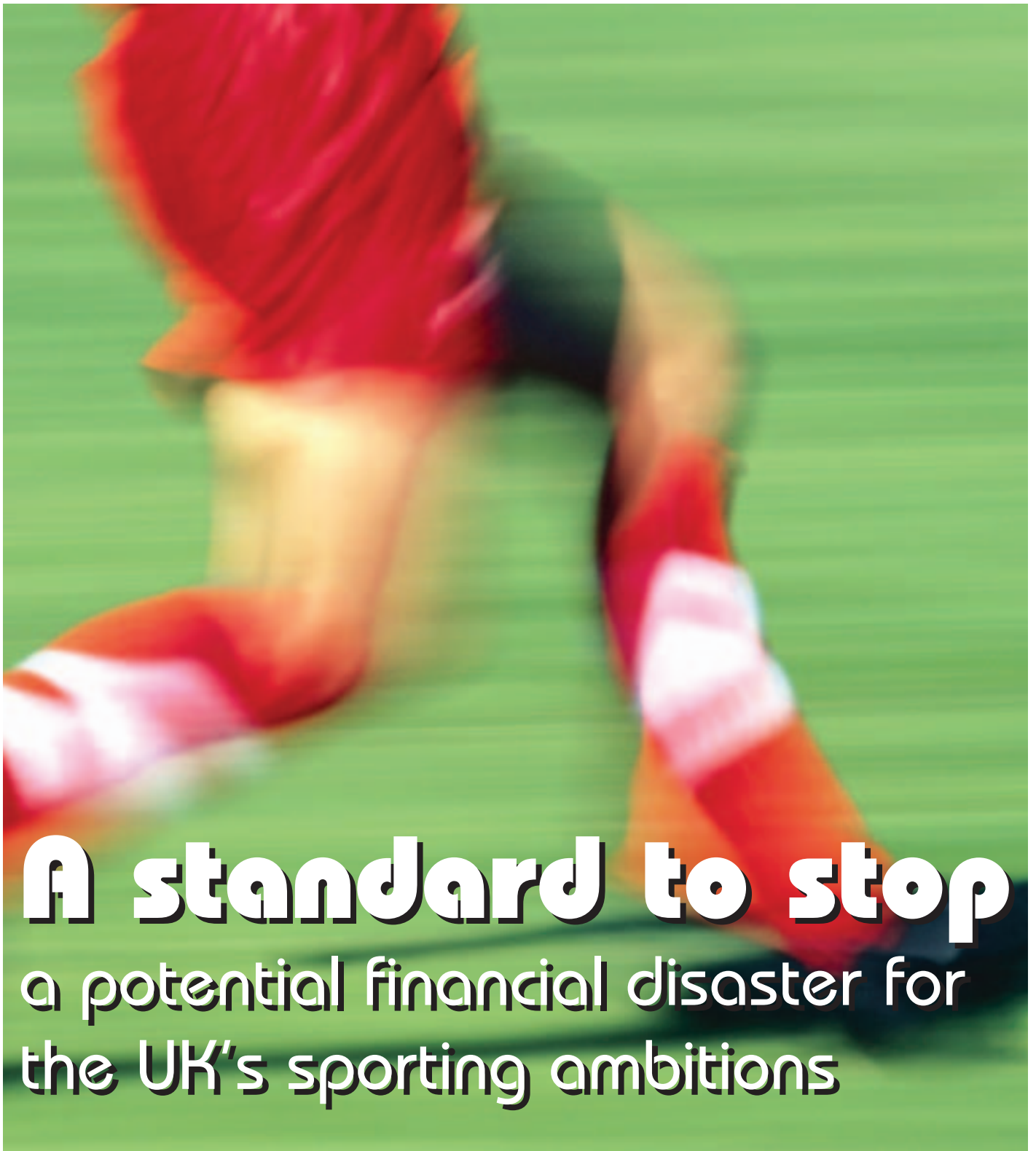
Westminster Business School

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A standard to stop a potential financial disaster for the UK's sporting ambitions

Bill Hollins FIED looks at the latest version of BS7000-3 and offers his somewhat controversial opinion.

After much delay it has, at last, appeared. The updated version of BS 7000-3 'Guide for managing the design of services' is now available. In the UK 80 per cent of people are now employed in the service sector and the growth of services is occurring in most industrialised countries. Even in Japan, since the beginning of this century more people are now employed in services

than in manufacturing¹ and it is reckoned that 20 per cent of the employees work on the service side of most manufacturing organisations.

So what has this to do with engineering designers? Recent research has shown that only about half the people who work in the service sector know what design is – and the overwhelming majority of these haven't

got a clue how to do it.² This means that our engineering design skills could be used in the much larger (and growing) service sector.

The content of this new standard suggests that our skills and knowledge could indeed be applied. The new service standard should certainly be read by all involved in designing new services (or improving existing ones). Illogical and damaging decisions by poor design management (in the total sense) has caused such market and financial failures as the Millennium Dome and the Channel Tunnel.

It can even be possible to predict the failure and the potential financial disaster should London win its bid for the Olympic Games. A similar situation, regarding the new Wembley Stadium, was highlighted in 'Failure: Wembley here we go', *Engineering Designer*, March/April 2001. This is because (I believe) the design of these has not been considered in a logical fashion and their management has not been undertaken in a rational way with the main decisions being taken at the low cost front end of the process.

Lack of using a logical design process will result in 'fire-fighting' at the high cost end of the process with, once again, the taxpayer bailing out those at the top for their inadequate design management. There is still time for those involved in the London Olympics applying the logic shown in the standard and avoid another costly failure as such failures are beginning to be the norm in large projects whenever the government (of any shade) becomes involved.

Whilst writing the standard there was a lot of discussion between committee members as to whether or not it should be 'state of the art' and include the latest thinking and knowledge on the topic. On the other side, some felt that as so few practitioners in the service sector fully understand the management of service design that the standard should be pitched at a lower level. This would make it easier to understand and apply. This dilemma has not really been resolved and even as chairman of the committee I find that parts of the draft are quite hard to understand, whereas other parts have been 'dumbed down' to make the meaning more obvious.

It was in 1989 that the British



Standard BS 7000 'Guide to managing product design' was published and this was the world's first standard that attempted to advise people how product design could be managed. It was a guide, as are all the subsequent standards in this series. This means that the standard reflects the latest knowledge on the topic, but our understanding has not yet reached a stage where we can say that it is the 'best way'. In other words, the contents cannot be made the requirement of a contract. The alternative is a 'specification' or 'conformance' standard to which producers must comply, such as the design of the 13-amp plug or the recipe for petrol.

Realising that this original standard covered too broad an area, it was replaced by three 'sector' standards:

- Guide to Managing Service Design (BS 7000-3) in 1994;
- Guide to Managing Design in Construction (BS 7000-4) in 1996; and
- Guide to Managing the Design of Manufactured Products (BS 7000-2) in 1997.

The first design management standard was written around what was considered the four design management principles – Planning, Communication, Monitoring and Control. It could be argued that these should appear in all of the management of all activities. Since the first 'Service Design Management' standard the management of design has been based around the organisation of the process for developing new products and services and so, in each subsequent design management standard, the process has been defined and management of this process has been specified. This has made the standards easier to understand (and write).

The new service standard includes a long list of definitions to aid understanding of the words and terms used in the standard and by practitioners in the field and this should help those unfamiliar with design. Surprisingly, it includes the first definition of 'Design Management' some 16 years after the first design management standard appeared.



This is:

'The totality of the design activity, its administration and contribution to an organisation's performance

NOTE: Design management includes the organisation and implementation of the process for developing new products and services'.

The first main section of the guide is 'Managing Service Design at the Organisation Level' aimed at top executives. But the main 'doing it' part appears in 'Managing Service Design at the Project Level' and this follows a design process through every stage from 'Trigger' to the eventual termination and perhaps disposal of the service. With previous standards in the series users found the various figures to be a great help and so we ensured that there are a lot within this standard to aid with clarification and understanding. There is also a list of useful reading at the back.

Not that this new standard is perfect. Unfortunately, the format of all standards has to conform to BS0 'A standard for standards'. This defines all aspects of the appearance and structure of any standard. In some ways it makes

sense that all British Standards should be presented in the same format so that those familiar with one can find their way around any other. Unfortunately, there are many aspects demanded from BS0 that makes a standard aesthetically poor, ergonomically unacceptable and the net result is that people who should be using standards are 'turned off' by the whole appearance of the documents. To give an example of this, in the past, the heads of the Design Council have felt that they could not recommend the British Standards on Design Management because they were so badly designed.

To further complicate matters, the British Standards Institution have recently updated BS0 and in some ways it makes standards even more difficult to read and therefore more unattractive to those very people that they are trying to attract. This insistence by the British Standards Institution can be demonstrated with two examples – with the BS 7000-3 update a new format for the appearance was proposed by the committee so that users could easily find their way through the process using a series of highly visual diagrams. Someone who was well versed in such

matters designed these diagrams but the editorial department of BSI rejected these. The diagrams may yet appear in another publication.

As another example, with the new BS 7000-6 *Guide to Managing Inclusive Design*, the only concession to those who would most need to use it is a version in bigger print. The content is good but the structure and appearance is dreadful. Even the font used is not one recommended for the dyslexic. This makes an Inclusive Design standard quite exclusive. I am not suggesting a 'free-for-all' in the layout and appearance of British Standards, but there certainly is the time to get a group of the right people together to discuss how to make standards more appealing to those who ought to be using them.

Also to be published shortly is BS 7373 *'Product specifications – Part 3: Guide to identifying criteria for specifying a service offering.'* This is another useful guide to help with design management and its importance can be best demonstrated when it is realised that poor marketing research and poor specifications are the root cause of the majority of service (and product) failures. The chairman for this standard, Roy Scruton, is also a member of the IED.

So I advise you to get your hands on these standards as designing for the service sector could well be the future of your employment. They are available from: The British Standards Institution, 389 Chiswick High Road, London W4 4AL. Tel. 0208 997 9000 or visit www.bsi-global.com.

References

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2. Hollins WJ (2004). Are you being served? Research into service design management compared to product design and the development of BS 7000 – 'Guide to managing the design of services' Design 2004. 8th Int. Design Conf. May 14-17 Dubrovnik Croatia.

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