

others could follow. This flaw is the tendency for departments to address each new problem with a new headline initiative – competition, DIS, TLMC, SROs, LODs etc. – and fail to examine where one initiative may conflict with another, surely an examination and implementation of the conclusions which should have primacy in any particular acquisition. This sets industry an almost impossible conundrum and has them wandering in a maze without a map. There is, I suggest, a need to bring government acquisition policy and practice together in a single place, whether it be the OGC or, given their much greater and longer direct practical experience, the former

Defence Procurement Agency (DPA) (now part of Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S)). It would probably need re-naming as it would need to examine the various policy initiatives and importantly their inter-relationships, decide what the guiding principles are and follow them through, see all government acquisition and its processes in a truly joined-up way, and ensure that industry understands exactly what the policies are.

Perhaps the most important thing of all is to remember that ‘man on the bus’. ■

Debate: Is Digitisation Dead?

Dr Jim Storr's paper in last October's edition on the factors that have caused digitisation to fall far short of the vision, has sparked much interest and debate. The author takes stock of what has been said and answers two points in detail. He says that those who do not learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them.

Mandy Rice-Davies and Digitisation

From: Dr Jim Storr

Jim Storr is an independent defence analyst. His paper, The Failure of Digital Command and Information Systems, was published in the October 2010 edition of RUSI Defence Systems and has provoked considerable interest and comment. Here he responds to some of the comment.

Showgirls and prostitutes sometimes display a deeply incisive knowledge of human nature; typically based on close, first-hand experience. When told that Lord Astor denied having had an affair with her, Mandy Rice-Davies (a key player in the Profumo Affair) famously said, “Well, he would, wouldn't he?”

In a previous article, I contended that the Army's battlefield digitisation programme has failed and that the reasons were largely human. We have now had seven responses, totalling over 10,000 words. It is interesting to see what they say. Before doing so, however, we should clear up a misconception. Bowman *is* Digitisation. Digitisation required a common battlefield infrastructure, provided at tactical levels by Bowman. Bowman is critical. Digitisation could not, and can not, succeed unless Bowman succeeds.

In his reply, the former Deputy IPT Leader for Bowman pointed out several current problems with digitisation. Among other things he considers that we are “doomed to suffer the same issues again”; unless we put the soldier at the heart of all relevant decisions. A very experienced operations research analyst said that almost all of the evidence about the effectiveness of Digitisation was negative. It was, however, all ‘written up’ due to a bad case of groupthink. Two professors (a psychologist and a sociologist) discussed some deeply problematic aspects of complex human and technical systems. A very senior CIS strategist pointed out some very telling issues relating to IT-led change

management. Many of his points relate to human behaviour: risk management; relationships with the user; and so on.

There were two dissenting replies. Both were from brigadiers who have, or had, a large influence on delivering the Digitisation programme. Both suggested that Digitisation has not failed. Well, they would, wouldn't they? Let's take two of their points in detail:

- Firstly, Project GP3 outgrew the infrastructure. Why did that happen? How did a software-only project outgrow stated hardware limitations? Is there something about software that does that? In practice that was a major failure of management. It was a real failure of several human institutions to impose control and discipline on a problematic project.
- Secondly, we were told that “the issues were all those of technology and finance”. We have just discussed a typical technical issue. As for finance, in practice we did not fit the programme to the available money. That is a very real, human, management issue. The basic requirement for digitisation was very simple. We could have procured that very cheaply.

Has digitisation failed? Well, if Bowman has failed to deliver, digitisation has failed. Are the real issues all human? Well, almost all of the key problems boil down to human issues.

The whole purpose of a review such as this is to generate hindsight. We once ran a study day which looked at the problems of digitisation. We heard, for example, from a weapons staff officer who had worked on the Wavell project 20 years before. In summing up, the chairman pointed out that almost all of the important lessons were, fundamentally, human. **That conference took place in 1999.** Unfortunately, none of today's senior decision-makers were present. It is well said that those who do not learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them. ■