

## Editorial



Dear All,

We hope that this edition finds you refreshed after the summer season. True, the weather hasn't been that great this year (was that *really* August?) but that's just an extra piece of variety to manage with a mac in the rucsac or an umbrella in the briefcase.

So where are we at? This edition summarises the current state of play for a number of new initiatives that are currently being progressed within SCiO. Have a look at the contents list below. We've got the much awaited second instalment of Denis' story from the Sports Association Study along with more details about the forthcoming

open meeting in Manchester.

What's more, SCiO is planning an excursion "down South". It seems that there is enough interest in the Southern half of the country to hold the open meeting planned for January in or near London. Will that be a round of shandies in the bar afterwards Patrick?

As ever, we are interested in any thoughts or feedback you might have and *in particular any ideas for items for inclusion*.

Have a great autumn.

Dave and Gordon

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## SCiO AGM

For the first time in recent years we departed from the format of running the AGM as a decision forum. This followed the rejuvenation of the board into a proper executive body charged with executing the strategy set by the members. As a result, many more of the day to day decisions have been taken on by board members and there was less need for the AGM to deal with those issues. The result was that the AGM element of the April meeting was much shorter

than in previous years and rather less lively – very much like a “normal” AGM in fact. Directors were nominated and elected under the eagle gaze of Alex as the returning officer and a couple of significant decisions were taken: around a new professional development programme and the ongoing development of the website.....

Patrick Hoverstadt

## SCiO The SCiO Professional Development Programme (PDP)

The big policy shift agreed at the AGM was to launch a new professional development programme (PDP). Penny has long argued that there is a demand from practicing and would be systems practitioners for learning support. So after dipping a toe in the water with the existing courses, the new programme is designed to address this need.

The PDP is reassuringly radical in its approach and will be quite unlike traditional academic courses and goes significantly beyond commercial style training courses. Firstly it will be largely learner led and secondly it will combine three strands of learning: technical skills, “craft” skills and theory.

So, the technical skills will be focused on particular systems approaches – either different systems disciplines e.g. systems dynamics, or their application to specific fields e.g. a VSM approach to finance management. Craft skills are core skills practitioners need whatever the technical area they are practicing in e.g. “gathering information” or “recursive thinking”. Theory is ...well theory, what the underlying theory is in systems thinking and what it means in practice. Modules will be at one of three levels – case based/away from the workplace for level 1, workplace based for level 2 and across organisational boundaries for level 3.

Learning will be group based, in workshops at Level 1 and in learning sets at Level 2 and Level 3, and we’ll run a Level 2 or Level 3 module whenever a group (notionally 5+) organise themselves around a topic.

All Level 2 and Level 3 modules will be assessed, but it’s not currently proposed that courses will be academically accredited. So if you’re interested in developing your professional practice rather than getting an extra badge, this should be good for you as we can concentrate on professional development rather than serving the (sometimes conflicting) needs of academe.

For more information on the SCiO PDP, and the modules currently available or planned, see the SCiO website [www.scio.org.uk](http://www.scio.org.uk) or contact:

### Contact

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Jane Searles, [jane.searles@btinternet.com](mailto:jane.searles@btinternet.com),  
(01538 372804)

### SCiO Courses—next level 1 modules (open to all)

#### SC101 Viable Systems Model - Structures

An introduction to a powerful systems approach to modeling organization.

This is a whole day workshop designed for those relatively new to the VSM and provides a basic understanding in building a diagnostic model of an organization using VSM.

“At last a practical explanation of VSM for practitioners. This course has been very welcome”

#### SC103 The Systems Minefield

‘Systems thinking’ – what is it? What is it for? Why are there so many approaches – and which ones do what?

A guided tour through the systems minefield, with an overview of four of the most commonly applied systems approaches. Learn about Systems Dynamics; Circles of Customer Need; Soft Systems Methodology; ‘Lean’ and the Viable Systems Model – and what they can (and can’t) do for you.

#### SC102 Viable Systems Model – Dynamics

##### Modelling complexity and instability

This is a whole day workshop that follows on from the workshop SC101 Viable System Model – Structures. It will provide you with an understanding of the analysis of the dynamics of an organisation, using VSM.

Saturday 25th Sept 2010, Milton Keynes

SCiO members and Open University  
‘systems’ students: £20; non-members: £50

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Robin Asby, [sigmar2@aol.com](mailto:sigmar2@aol.com)

Friday 1st Oct 2010, Manchester

SCiO members: £20; non-members: £50

Contact:

Penny Marrington, [sigmaR2@aol.com](mailto:sigmaR2@aol.com)

Friday 19th Nov 2010, Manchester

SCiO members: £20; non-members: £50

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Patrick Hoverstadt, [patrick@fractal-consulting.com](mailto:patrick@fractal-consulting.com)

**These level 1 modules offer participants a grounding in a set of systems based methodologies for tackling a wide range of organisational issues.**

## Website Update

The revised SCiO website went live last November with fairly basic functionality. Since then, Rob Lever and I have been endeavouring to keep the content up to date using fairly laborious manual updating.

As the next step in the website development we want to make more use of the 'content management' functionality that Drupal provides so that content is easier to update by the content owners and is presented in a professional and consistent set of styles. More advanced functionality such as a members' forum and online membership services and payment are also high on the agenda.

To move forward to this next stage, Rob and I

have been introduced to a local web business called **menus+blocks** (<http://menusandblocks.co.uk>) who specialise in Drupal developments. They are also very active in running the NW Drupal Users Group (<http://nwdug.org.uk>) which we attended in January. Over the next weeks I will be meeting with **m+b** to discuss requirements and budgets with view to asking SCiO for funds.

To introduce the professional functionality that we need to take SCiO forward, Rob and I are convinced that this is the right route to take and we will keep you up to date with developments.

Steve Hales

## The OMM (Organisational Maturity Model)

The Organisational Maturity Model (OMM) has been developed by SCiO. It is driven by a questionnaire and is designed to show the structural integrity of your organisation (initially just from one perspective).

The OMM allows managers to improve the capability of their organisation to operate more effectively and adapt to change. It does this by providing a framework to develop the structural integrity of the organisation.

For an individual having an explanation of the systemic causes of the problems faced can suggest alternative ways forward. The OMM provides reassurance about aspects of the organisation that are working well and insights into those aspects of your working life that are caused by the system rather than individuals.

### Who should use this?

If you want to assess the strengths and weaknesses in your organisation's structure,

if you sense your organisation is not running as effectively as it might,

if you are concerned about the long term viability of your organisation,

if you sense that actions are being taken are 'treating' symptoms rather than the underlying causes;

... then you will find The Organisational Maturity Model useful.

The OMM subgroup set off to create an Organisational Maturity Model based on the Viable Systems Model. The whole task proved too much in one go, so we settled on an initial 'cosmo quiz' size offering which we could make available to anyone who wanted to try it. We have struggled to keep the work within such a limited ambition and it has inevitably become a bit more sophisticated than we originally envisaged, now having most of the mechanisms necessary for a full scale version, but limited to a single user version with 24 questions.

At this first release there will be IT supported and paper options for you to choose from on our website. There will also be one version suitable for a manager and one suitable for a director.

The OMM has proved remarkably powerful in initial testing, given the 24 question limitation. So expect this to appear on our SCiO website by the end of September. I will let you know when it is available. It will then be up to you, the SCiO members and wider interest group to try it out and recommend it to anyone you know who you think may benefit. It is intended to demonstrate the practical value of systems approaches and to help get SCiO more widely known about as well as introduce the VSM to working managers and directors. We will eagerly await your feedback and to see how far it has travelled and who has found it useful!

Jane Searles (OMM sub-group board representative)

## Open Meeting: **Mon 11th Oct, 10am – 4.30pm, Manchester Business School**

### **Session 1: Systems from Scratch - Penny Marrington**

Penny has taught *Systems Thinking* in the Higher Education sector since 1980. In this presentation, she will talk about how people develop into systems thinkers and practitioners. Whilst it appears that systems thinking comes naturally to people (but it possibly gets 'educated out of them'), getting to

grips with systems thinking fully, and being successful in practice, seems to demand a certain level of intellectual maturity.

Penny describes her findings from over the years to reach some conclusions about how people best learn to think and act systemically.

### **Session 2: The application of the VSM in Local Authority Development Control Services Catherine Wynn**

Planning Services, and Development Control in particular, within English local authorities, operate in a continually evolving political and economic environment. Over the past three years, for example, they have experienced a climate of growing pressures and high case loads, only to enter a downturn phase due to a large drop in applications, and therefore income. More recently, they have faced reforms introduced by the newly elected Coalition Government.

2007, which explored the systems within local authority development control services in 3 distinct areas of England. The Viable System Model was used to reflect on current practice case studies and identify areas of both strengths and weaknesses. These case studies examine the ability of the services to adapt to the changes within the service environment.

Catherine will discuss the applicability and value of the VSM method within this particular context and introduce some of the key recommendations which flowed from the work.

This presentation will introduce the findings of a PhD research project commenced in September

### **Session 3: Craft Skills Workshop - Recursive Structures and Logic Patrick Hoverstadt**

SCiO has made the strategic decision to create a Professional Development Programme for the Systems Professional. The structure will be a portfolio of development modules built around three themes: Technical Skills, Craft Skills, and Theory. Patrick will lead a practical session on the craft skills of *map-*

*ping levels of logic*. This is a foundational skill with many areas of application, including: analysing organisations using VSM, structuring problem solving, project planning, conducting negotiations and understanding ethical problems.

### **Session 4: Perceptual Control Theory and its Application to Organisations Warren Mansell**

Perceptual Control Theory (PCT; Powers et al., 1960; Powers, 1973) is a psychological approach based on control systems engineering, that builds on some of the principles of cybernetics.

control the same and/or different experiences within an organization. It is also used to guide Method of Levels, a questioning technique used to help people restore control over their lives by facilitating the reorganisation of longstanding problems.

According to PCT, 'behaviour is the control of perception'. In other words all observable action is the means to an end, or more specifically, it is dynamically varied in order to maintain an internal standard. Within PCT, this is achieved mathematically through the negative feedback loop. These units are organised into a hierarchical network. Where two units control the same variable at different reference points, conflict occurs, and this is resolved via a trial and error modification of the control system properties known as reorganisation.

Dr Warren Mansell is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology and a Chartered Clinical Psychologist.

If you wish to look at his work in advance, you could sample some of his 60+ publications or 4 books including *The Bluffer's Guide to Psychology*, that reflects his accessible style.

Fuller details can be found at [www.pctweb.org](http://www.pctweb.org) including computer demonstrations.

PCT is used to model the internal goal structure within an individual, but can be used to model the interactions between individuals as they strive to

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**Next Open Meeting  
Monday 11th  
October at  
10am to  
4.30pm,  
Manchester  
Business  
School**

**£10 fee**

**An Open Meeting is planned to be held in the South in January**

### Open Meeting: Mon 17th Jan 2011 SCiO Event in the South—10am – 4.30pm Central London

**Session 1:** Modelling Multi-Methodology & Multi-Agency Working — Patrick Hoverstadt

**Session 2:** OMM – a powerful Organisational Maturity tool—Dave Mettam & Jane Searles

**Session 3:** Craft Skills Workshop - Developing Transparency & Trust—Aidan Ward

**Session 4:** Taming Organisational Complexity—Stephen Brewis

Contact: Doug Haynes at [doug@ei4change.org.uk](mailto:doug@ei4change.org.uk) (0151 638 3363)

### Development Days

Recent Development Day Topics

This list illustrates the variety of development topics that have been discussed at recent Development Days. Numbers attending these events which are held at Manchester Business school (free for members) are increasing.

Recent topics have included: Ambiguity, Circle of Customer Needs Update, Deliver effectively – social benefit, Extracting Value from complex Systems, Generative Grammar and Pattern Languages, Greater Manchester Transport System, Hiding from Reality, Model of Sustainable Organisation, Models of Care and Assessment, Monitoring Control Loops, OMM Feedback, , Sports Association Study (see 'Lessons from a Sports Association Study' in this issue), World Cup, VSM of

SCiO, Performance Measures – emergent properties – criminal justice, Procurement

If you are seeking the chance to explore a topic that is of interest to you with a group of seasoned systems practitioners please come along to the next meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> October at 10am at Manchester Business School. It would be helpful if you would let Jane Searles ([jane.searles@btinternet.com](mailto:jane.searles@btinternet.com)) know you are planning to attend.

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Dave Mettam at [dave@mettam.plus.com](mailto:dave@mettam.plus.com) (0161 443 1420)

### News: Public Administration Committee Conference

**Nottingham Trent University, 6th - 8<sup>th</sup> September 2010.**

An opportunity to hear about and discuss wide ranging aspects of Systems Thinking in the Public Sector.

#### Speakers:

Prof. Brian Collins - Chief Scientific Adviser to DfT and BIS:

Dr. Peter Dudley: Dudley Consulting

Jan Brophy: Student Paper: Loughborough University, Dept of Information Science

Doug Haynes: SCiO

Dr Arturo Vega: Faculty of Business and Management, Canterbury Christ Church University

Natalie Marguet: Student Paper: Liverpool, John Moores University and Fusion21

Ann Mulhaney: Dept of Information Science, Loughborough University

Prof. John Beckford, Dept. Information Science, Loughborough University and Beckford Consulting

The schedule covers two 90 minute sessions on the Tuesday morning- one from 9.30 to 11.00am and one from 11.30 to 13.00.

The conference programme is available, with online registration on

[http://www.ntu.ac.uk/nbs/news\\_events/pac\\_2010/Programme/index.html](http://www.ntu.ac.uk/nbs/news_events/pac_2010/Programme/index.html)

The cost for attendance for the whole of Tues. 7<sup>th</sup> Sept. is £95

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Doug Haynes at [doug@ei4change.org.uk](mailto:doug@ei4change.org.uk) (0151 638 3363)

**News about a conference on Systems Thinking in the Public Sector**

## Lessons from a Sports Association Study – Denis Adams

The last newsletter included a brief account of a meeting with Stafford Beer to discuss research on sports organisations. He posed a series of questions that led to some exploratory investigations of the national governing body (NGB) of a particular sport. These revealed a number of organisational issues that will be covered in three parts.

### Part one: The Constraint on Potential and Self-organisation

The first exploratory questions involved the nature of the activity. Unlike many reported studies of enterprises at the time, this activity was almost voluntary where participants could come and go relatively easily. Beyond individuals, the first organised grouping was a club that produced teams to compete in league games. That brought into focus the question of why participants got involved in club activities; games and administration.

Surveys of players motives showed that there were two distinct groups; those pursuing skill development for competitive performance, and recreational players. The recreational group was believed to be larger than the competitive group in most clubs.

Then an examination of the support received by the two groups revealed that the clubs and the NGB were entirely focused on competitive activities. Every committee member had a competitive background and all meeting agendas and newsletters focused entirely on competitive performance.

As 'competitive' members require more resources; coaches, training courses, squad and team training, etc., a key role of the NGB and affiliated clubs was to raise extra funds for these, beyond routine grants from the Sports Council.

Besides membership subscription to clubs who were affiliated to NGB, individuals could also make a subscription to NGB that gave access to coaching courses, pathways to higher levels of competition up to the national team and official newsletters.

Recreational members therefore saw no point in paying the 'national' subscription, yet committees of these clubs sought to maximise this subscription and would continually chase them to pay up. A significant proportion of these members would duck and dive to avoid contact with the officials which resulted in a sort of schism between club committees and recreational players in most clubs.

Anecdotal evidence existed of clubs and leagues

who were not affiliated to the NGB. Desktop research and fieldwork eventually revealed a thriving sector for recreational players who wanted to avoid 'affiliation' bureaucracy. It seemed to be an entirely self-organised activity. Throughout the country, thriving local leagues of clubs had formed with the minimum of administration to produce fixture lists with dates, venues, and their own match officials who used the international federation rules.

A general statistical sampling model was developed and presented to the Sports Council for estimating, with reliable accuracy limits, the population of unaffiliated members in any sport. Preliminary tests of the model suggested that, in this sport, the 'maverick' sector was huge compared to the affiliated activity.

The most striking feature of this sector was the vitality of participants to raise funds through any legitimate means including car boot sales and social events. In some cases, these funds were used to develop their own club facilities involving professional friends and volunteers in their design and construction.

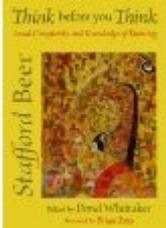
This case confirmed a previous belief in the potential for creating and exploiting space for self-organisation in enterprises. One wondered about the potential synergies if the affiliated sector could have released the natural spirit of recreational members by their recognition and support.

This issue always reminds me of a point that Tom Peters made at an executive workshop in London; "Your employees are hard working, conscientious and creative except for the eight hours that you pay them".

On reflection, one could now see the affiliated situation as being the result of an interplay between the various committees and members via their unvarying low variety models - as explained in the *Cybernetics of Humankind* (chapter 3, Think before you Think) and which is the foundation for the pathological archetypes 5 and 6 (Chapter 5, The Fractal Organisation).

The same situation was later discovered in other amateur sports and very recently an associate recognised the same schism between competitive and social players and its consequences in his bridge club.

Nearly 30 years on, the current web site of this NGB accepts that they still only administer 6% of the total activity in England.



## Bookworm

'Think before you Think: Social Complexity and Knowledge of Knowing' has been personally produced and edited by David Whittaker with foreword by Brian Eno. This stylish book is the largest and most varied miscellany of Stafford Beer's work, and includes some papers that had previously been very difficult to find.

It offers an introduction to many of the key concepts and ideas around a unique practical philosophy that has been shown to have timeless relevance to thinking about new complex issues.

Core works are included that Stafford used to produce his own insights and alternative ways of thinking about exceedingly complex systems,

many of which are also presented in this collection of papers.

But Stafford didn't want people to follow his models and results blindly. He wanted everyone to think for themselves; as he had done. He taught himself to see, and gently urged friends to "just have a go, do your own thinking and modeling" with a will to fulfil potential in self and society.

A stock of copies has been set aside for initial marketing and potential reviewers.

Just email me at [denisadams@btinternet.com](mailto:denisadams@btinternet.com) if you would like a complimentary copy.

## Noticeboard

### Calendar

#### Program of events and meetings

#### Workshop dates for your diary

SC101 Viable System Structures	Sat 25th Sept 2010	Milton Keynes
SC103 The Systems Minefield	Frid 1st Oct 2010	Manchester
SC102 Viable system Model – Dynamics	Frid 19th Nov 2010	Manchester

#### Meetings:

Development Day:	Sun 10th Oct 2010	Manchester
Open Day	Mon 11th Oct 2010	Manchester
Open Day	Mon 17th Jan 2011	Central London

**Website:** [scio.org.uk/systems](http://scio.org.uk/systems)

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Gordon Kennedy ([kennedygordon85@yahoo.com](mailto:kennedygordon85@yahoo.com))

**Open Meetings:** Doug Haynes

# SCiO