

Old Habits Die Hard

March/April 2018, *Informed Infrastructure*

Mark,

As I was reading your "From the Editor" column, I had some thoughts running through my head that prompted me to reply.

I've read *Chariots of the Gods* (and many other similar books) and, in fact, did my "graduate thesis" on the subject in eighth grade, so I think that's a valid hypothesis that warrants further investigation. I would expand more on that here, but I left my copy at my parents' home in Pennsylvania and will have to get it first.

As to your statistics on productivity increases, I've never investigated those numbers so won't comment on their validity, but I have heard similar statements and commentary by others.

Personally, I think "lack of training," "inadequate designs," and "extras and delays" hits the productivity mark more squarely, but let's take up this "resistance to change" item that you focused on.

Have you considered that your premise that "newer" industries have experienced greater productivity increases than the "older" construction industry actually points to the root answer of your "productivity" quandary? If something has been done for eons, successfully, why change? We have all heard "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." So you better give me a pretty darn good reason to change what I'm doing.

As you state, there seems to be an innate construction skill ingrained in us. But I disagree with your supposition that it's the "hard to break old habits" that generates resistance. I believe our intelligence can overcome that (especially as engineers), and my experience has disproved the classical suggestion that you submitted for this resistance. And forget about the complexities of anthropology, just look at it logically ... which is the only way to analyze man, a rational being.

Now, my suppositions include nothing about the potential for irrationality to rear its ugly head, and we all know that it does with some individuals, but you can't form a premise with an assumption of total chaos and random behavior. So let's assume that we can maintain our wits about us. With that said, I believe that "resistance" is *not* inbred, but *consciously determined* based on one thing: added value—as determined by the individual from where he or she stands (or sits).

So how do we look at this topic of "change" and "resistance"?

By finding the added value in anything that attempts to change what I'm doing. The yardstick is what I'm currently doing, and any "change" is benchmarked against that. For example,

should I move to the latest version of any software? The questions that need to be asked are: "what value does it offer me?" and "is any 'added value' worth the effort?"

Why do people upgrade their phone? Their TV set? Their car? Early adopters aside, it's because there's an added value. That value is—more often than not—an *individually* perceived value, not a societal one.

Let's take civil engineering software as an example. Just because something new hits the streets, does it automatically mean that everyone should dump their old software and immediately upgrade? Everyone needs to be asking themselves the question: "Why?" This question requires a good, meaningful, applicable, honest, technically complete answer; not a superficial, financially driven mandate from someone

who isn't qualified to make that call (as is often done).

Resistance to change? Why would anyone keep changing their calculator every three months just because a new one came out? Every decision needs to be properly assessed, and the positives as well as the negatives need to be cataloged. Then, and only then, can the true value be determined.

Resistance to change? I don't think people really are resistant to change, they're resistant to poor, inappropriate, improper decisions that adversely affect their ability to get their jobs done.

Resistance to change? Expect resistance if you ram something down someone's throat without consulting them, or providing proper training, while expecting them to just "make it work."

Resistance to change? Show these "resistant" individuals (or industries) something that makes sense (and *prove* the added value), and I'll bet you'll find the agreement, acceptance and adoption that's desirable.

As an engineer, surveyor or construction practitioner, we can *all* benefit from a greater interpersonal understanding of society and the people we're constantly engaged with on a daily basis. And I believe that if we did, we would see those elusive productivity gains.

Civilly yours,
Mark "Zen" Ditko
Zen Engineering Inc.
Los Angeles

Mark,
Thanks for the feedback and interesting points. I agree with a lot of what you say, especially that change for change's sake is not a reason to change. If the change does not provide a benefit, there is no need to go through the hassle.

Mark Scacco, P.E.
AEC Business Analyst & Consultant
Scacco LLC



Please send comments and letters to:
Todd Danielson tdanielson@v1-media.com or
Kevin Carmody kcarmody@v1-media.com

Traditional mail:
attn: Todd Danielson
1441 S Plymouth Ct., Suite H
Chicago, IL 60605