

## Productivity is not accidental



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Today's business environment demands more competitive outturns for projects, and for the UK's regulated water companies the drive to deliver more effectively and efficiently is ever more prevalent. It is therefore imperative that the supply chain should align to this challenge with a focus on productivity and skills.

We have already come a long way. As an industry we have fewer skilled people doing more. Higher productivity cannot simply come from an expectation that individuals will work still harder and longer, and not even that they should work smarter, rather we need more game changing collaboration within organisations and the wider business environment.

Productivity is, rightly, associated with innovation and development; yet

our industry is mature, meaning radical advances in product and process innovation are unlikely. Nevertheless, improvements are coming through technical innovation, perhaps not in giant steps but in smaller incremental changes that together become materially significant by enabling reduced capital and operational costs. Often these changes come about by better organisation of product and solutions data and information which identifies inefficiencies and waste leading to rationalised product ranges and selection of better components and more suitable suppliers.

Productivity improvement is constrained by the availability of skills, but with government initiatives now promoting and delivering apprenticeship schemes, the supply chain can help rebuild skills, knowledge and experience to serve the industry.

Productivity can also be improved by 'one time engineering'; organising the industry and supply chain around building solutions that are less bespoke. Complete standardisation isn't feasible but driving for more

standardisation means procurement effectiveness is often improved by enabling greater volumes of standard components to be purchased. More opportunities emerge to build off-site and for the operator parts are more accessible, quicker to deliver and better value though a more standardised approach. More standard equipment becomes easier and safer to maintain and repair.

Another potentially more important aspect of productivity improvement is more about the connectivity of one business process with another. Here the opportunity to innovate around enterprise resource planning systems that use workflow templates, connect business information across workflows, have remote input and ready access and use of data for user and management information can all play a part.

As Paul J Meyer said: "Productivity is never an accident. It is always the result of a commitment to excellence, intelligent planning and focused effort."

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