

Steve Dale Profile

I live and work in the UK, happily married with two grown-up children and two grandchildren – who keep me fit and young! I've been self-employed as a Knowledge and Information Professional since 1999, prior to which I worked for Reuters (now Thomson-Reuters), and before that, the Royal Navy.

My professional life and career have evolved from three key disciplines:

- understanding technology as an weapons engineer in the Royal Navy
- understanding information as a data quality manager for Reuters
- understanding people and behaviours as an independent knowledge management consultant

This may appear a strange career path, after all, what could possibly connect hunting for submarines, with the accuracy of real-time stock and commodity prices with knowledge management? The answer is that all of them rely on developing the “human algorithms” to be able to process and understand complex information. Something we're all called upon to do in an age where information is being pushed at us from all directions, and all of the time.

But probably the most complex, most interesting and most rewarding element is the challenge of understanding people and behaviours. I've often wondered whether I might have benefited from studying Anthropology or Social Psychology at an earlier stage in my career, rather than the technology and information management route that I took. However, I've benefited from being able to apply a more holistic perspective to the challenges I've faced as an independent consultant, since most of my work has required delivering solutions at the confluence of technology, information and people. A bit like a three-legged stool, you need all three (legs) to function effectively in order to deliver something useful and sustainable.

If this all seems a bit obscure, then I should explain that my consultancy work is primarily focused on helping clients improve knowledge sharing and collaboration through the deployment of learning networks that will promote personal and professional development. In a practical sense this means on-line communities. One of my biggest projects was implementing a collaborative platform and knowledge sharing strategy for local government in England, Wales and Scotland. Apart from having to address a massive cultural problem (local councils are essentially competing amongst themselves for finite resources and often averse to sharing knowledge and information with each other), there wasn't a suitable technology solution when the project started in 2005, and so this was built from the ground up. The success of the project can be measured by the fact that there were over 1000 cross-councils groups and over 150,000 users when I left the project in 2008.

I also think it's important to practice what you preach, or “walk the talk”. I thirst for new knowledge and consider myself a life-long learner, on a journey that doesn't have a time frame or a destination. It's this more than anything else that has enabled me to keep pace with the massive changes happening in the workplace and in our personal lives. I am happy to share what I know, and devote a lot of time and effort to nurturing and growing my social and professional networks – the places that I learn the most. There is no doubt that I've learnt more from people than books. It is worth reflecting that we've never had so many opportunities for personal development, and

so much of it is free (other than use of our time). I discovered MOOCs (Massive Open Online Communities) in 2012, and have completed three to date: Social Network Analysis (understanding networks), Social Psychology (understanding people) and Content Curation (creating value from information). Consequently – and paradoxically from the perspective of a freelance consultant – I can never be an “expert”, and am wary of those who think they are. Worse still if they proclaim it on their professional profile since that infers they have nothing to learn.

My future aims and ambitions can be summed up in one sentence: To remain relevant. I think that ought to be an aspiration for any career-minded individual, and a mantra for the information profession itself. At the end of the day it's all about creating value – for customers, stakeholders and anyone that looks to you for advice.

Finally, on a personal level, I think I'm an adventurer and a bit of a risk-taker, always seeking new challenges. I've walked the Inca Trail, climbed Mt Kilimanjaro, safari'd in the Masai Mara and the Serengeti, seen the Northern Lights, circumnavigated Australia and travelled over 1000 miles up the River Amazon. I'm a keen follower of all sports, but especially football and cricket. I'm also an eternal optimist, which is why I support West Ham Football Club.

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