

Graham Palmer - Life after UCSL



At the time that EDS acquired UCSL, I was a relatively new boy compared with my colleagues, having operated in the database space, flirted with UCSL's Viewdata offering, and worked on the Welbeck and Western Trust and Savings client accounts for about five and a half years in total. So there was no deeply ingrained allegiance to Unilever when the Texans came to town.

Without wishing to criticize UCSL, EDS was like a breath of fresh air, with big ideas, an "interesting" approach to employees and significant global momentum to make the market sit up and listen (enhanced by EDS' acquisition by GM).

In my first 9 years with EDS I was managed by either Charlie Cooper or his wife, Marianne, with a brief interlude under the late Durham Wishart at GM. I felt like one of the family. I was very fortunate in being asked to contribute to EDS's Systems Engineering Development Program, initially as a technical instructor, then class manager, then UK SED manager, then EDS International SED Manager. The definition of International here was "everything outside North America". So, I was also tasked with introducing the SED Program to Brazil and Venezuela, the highlight of which was being mugged on Copacabana beach in broad daylight (*). The lowlight was being exposed to corruption in the Brazilian police force when they wouldn't release an incident report for insurance purposes without a "consideration" being paid. (*) I was accompanied by a guy called Paul Newman, who failed to live up to his name!

After the SED Program I joined the GM account as Account Manager for Vauxhall Parts and later manager of all the Systems Engineers supporting Vauxhall. At one point a friendly colleague said "Graham, if you continue to treat your manager like this, you'll go a long way - I'm just not sure in which direction!". This was around the time when SD-Scicon was acquired (somewhat hostilely – if that's a word) and its manufacturing arm was placed under Marianne, alongside her GM responsibilities. Unfortunately, it wasn't profitable business and redundancy notices were served on 63 people. Three of us were despatched to Milton Keynes to deal with the fallout and try and place people in new roles. At the end of the day, I think only 5 people did not have employment.

It was around this time that I was recommended to the Inland Revenue bid team as an applications expert (!) by an Australian EDSer working in Geneva. This convoluted bit of networking set the direction for my next 11 years in EDS. My claim to fame is that I am the only EDS person to have been part of the IR bid team (although a late arrival), spent 10 years providing

services to IR based in Basingstoke or Telford and then had the job of closing down all the commercials at the end of the contract.

This cradle to grave experience had me in roles encompassing delivery of services to IR's 600 offices, senior client relationships, responsibility for managing a £4Bn contract, responsibility for Information Security, liaison with the trade union (including pay negotiations) and finally taking responsibility for the migration of all services to a new supplier and the transfer of 3000 employees under TUPE arrangements. One bizarre aspect of this was writing to myself, my wife and my daughter to explain our TUPE options (and also then receiving replies!).

I chose to remain with EDS, rather than transfer to the new supplier and took on a European role, managing EDS' new business solution architects. During 12 months in this role, I had 63 flights. Needless to say that the time spent in airports was my time, not company time! On one connecting flight, our plane pulled away from the terminal without the umbilical walkway being disconnected. The door was ripped off the plane. Oh well, if you're going to lose an airplane door, it's better to do it on the ground!

In mid 2006, EDS decided it had no more use for me. This news was delivered by my (American) manager who once again forgot I lived in Shropshire when he asked me to attend a meeting with him and HR (there was a clue) in Stockley Park at 08:30. I decided to take my pension. After 6 months gardening, golfing and decorating (not necessarily in that order) I took a part-time role as commercial manager and trainer for a small UK testing company. This came to an end after 4 years when they were acquired and my function was subsumed into the parent company. This was the trigger (May 2011) for me to forget how old I was and that I really should be slowing down. I have now formed my own training and consultancy company.

It should be fun!