

The gold at the end of the rainbow

by Stephen Walsh, Six Sigma Group



'If I have seen further, it is because I have stood upon the shoulders of giants!'

Those words were spoken by Sir Isaac Newton, in acknowledgement of the great achievements of the scientists that had gone before him and through their work inspired others to greatness.

The idea of scientific knowledge – any knowledge – building upon that which was conceived before it is at the heart of 'learning'. All that we know today is the compounded knowledge of yesterday. We take a fact from here and add it to an inspiration there, creating a new piece of knowledge to add to the body.

It is rather like the colours on an artist's palette. The artist takes green and adds it to red to get a third colour – brown. Truly, a synergetic relationship, from two colours we now have three, from which more can be made, and more, and more, ad infinitum.

So we can take the learning from one discipline and add it to the experiences of others to get new ideas. They build on each other. The chariot could not have been invented before the axle, which in turn needed the inspiration of the wheel.



The 'body of knowledge' is like an inverted pyramid, balanced on a single point but extending its base ever wider skywards. Each new fact, each unique combination of learning adds another stone to this upside-down structure. We learn by adding one disparate fact to another – sharing knowledge across the boundaries.

Harrison, a Lincolnshire watchmaker turned his knowledge to the puzzle of ocean navigation; the science of lasers – once a mere curiosity – has been transferred into communication; DNA sampling is linked to police work – human invention coming out of sharing without boundaries.

From the artist's palette we can ultimately create the rainbow, containing all colours, though the subtlety of shades is infinite. The pursuit of Excellence is like chasing a rainbow; it will always remain out of our grasp. Today's world class behaviour is tomorrow's norm, as the rainbow moves on from where we stand. Indeed, 'world class' defies definition – and yet it *definitely* has meaning. We can point to it; we can run towards it. Most certainly, there is a pot of gold at the end of that rainbow.

We are the artists, mixing our colours, we are the architects, adding the layers to the inverted pyramid.

The thing about a pyramid that is upside down is that its base can be expanded forever: there is no end to the growth of human knowledge and inspiration; there is no limit to our ability to achieve; there are no boundaries to our creativity.