Gareth Bunn

Interviewed by

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Welcome to the Archives of Information Technology. It's 17th December 2018 and we're in the offices of the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists in Smithfield, London. I'm Ian Symonds and I've been working in Information Technology and management consultancy since 1976, a period of enormous change in the industry. Today I'm talking to Gareth Bunn. Gareth started his career in IT at what was then known as the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Centre, in 1973. He was later influential in developing the services offered by the government's Central Computing and Telecommunications Agency. He then became a partner at Ernst & Young and a vice-president at Capgemini before setting up his own company to offer training in communication and leadership. We'll be talking about Gareth's background influences, some key events that shaped his career and his views on the industry today.

So, Gareth, where and when were you born?

I can't remember, I wasn't conscious at the time. No, it was – when, where? It was 1952 and it was in Leeds, so I'm a true Yorkshireman.

And your parents, what did they do?

Well, interesting, because my father was a scientist, he was Dean of the Faculty of Science at Leeds University, he was a lecturer in physical chemistry. My mother, on the other hand, was a very good English teacher. So I had both the, if you like, the softer skills input and the harder and analytical approach from my two parents.

And what was your family life like?

It was good. I have one sister. She inherited the visual arts skills, which I do not have at all. And I think I got most of the music genes that were available, from my parents.

I think we might touch on that a bit later, because I know you've pursued some musical interests in your career as well.

Yes.

And so what were the important influences on you in your very early life?

Very early life? Meaning? Well, I don't know really…

We're going to come on and talk about school and so on in a moment.

I really can't remember. Music was always there, actually, because I started learning piano when I was five, for a period. And being surrounded by, if you like, literature – mother was very interested in literature, books – so it was a, you could say, a slightly academic family. There were no real influences in the sense of commerce or business or anything like that, because they were both in the public sector, in the teaching world.

[0:03:19]
Okay. So, give us an overview of your education, from early schooling through secondary schooling, college and higher education. And then we'll go back and talk about each bit in a little bit more detail.

Well, early schooling was in Leeds, at a very good school, actually, Talbot Road. But I was only there for two years, I think, maybe three, before we moved to Harrogate, which meant moving school. And so, went to school in Harrogate, which was not a good school, so I won't mention its name, in the state sector. So my parents got me out of that and I did one year in a, it was called a prep school, private prep school, because they wanted me to go to a particular college, school in Harrogate, but to do so I would have needed to get a free place, it was a direct grant school, they couldn't afford the fees. So I had to pass an open examination, so they sent me to this private school, and of course it worked and I did get a free place. And that was my secondary schooling; O levels, as they were, and A levels. I wasn't a hard worker, I have to say. Laziness is a trait I've maintained throughout my life.

But you got fairly good, you got pretty good grades?

Yeah, got goodish grades.

And what did you study at A level?

Yeah, it was my O levels disappointed me, because I didn't get any grade 1s, and I failed my religious instruction – not surprisingly – and Latin, that really irked. However, yes, A levels got a bit better and we did, in that particular school, we did maths, physics, chemistry and another paper, which was general studies, which I enjoyed. So A, two Bs and a C. Wasn't bad. Of course my sister did much better than I did at A levels. [laughs]

[0:05:36]
And what were your outside interests when you were at school?

Well, music, because during my secondary schooling I learned the violin, so I spent till my sixth form as a violinist, as it were, and I actually played for the Harrogate string orchestra, which was kind of interesting. And so I was reasonable on the violin, I was also a chorister and won stuff with the Harrogate Music Festival and so on. So music was a strong theme throughout that period.

Okay, and then you went from there to…?

That was the mistake of my life, yes.

Nottingham University.

Well, can you imagine, Ian, if you have a mother who is in the arts and a father who is in the sciences, and my interest at school was English literature, it was music, I liked geography, but I wasn't really a, I wasn't a scientist by nature. So, well, you know, I was okay but the trouble was, it was being pulled in two directions and my mother would say now that she feels I should have done the arts. As it happened, I ended up doing civil engineering, and that was a big, big mistake, because it did not appeal. Frankly, I hated it. And while I was at university I did get through my first year and I was so frustrated with it that I decided I would change departments. I actually joined the philosophy and psychology department.   Well, it was a philosophy subsidiaries psychology degree course. They were all very happy with that, including my civil

engineering tutors and professors. And I was therefore looking forward to a different kind of university education. However, my father, when he got wind of this, sort of called me back home and spent a weekend of sort of psychological manipulation to get me to go back into civil engineering, which of course wasn't going to pay off and I did my second year twice. I had lots of fun. Of course what also happened was that I got into my other love of my life, which is theatre, and joined the drama society and got very, very involved with that. So I was writing, directing, producing, performing. And that's what I spent my time at university doing, actually, rather than going to lectures and passing examinations. But, you know, in those days it was sometimes regarded as a plus point if you 'dropped out', in inverted commas. And of course many fewer people actually went to university in that time.

And what was your relationship like with your teachers and tutors during that time?

Well, I remember one of them saying, it must have been in my second year, I applied for a job with the BBC actually, in radio, and I needed a reference so I went to see – I can't remember his name now, hm, terrible. Peel, I think it was. But anyway, I went to see him and explained what I was doing and he said, yes, Gareth, he said, let me tell you something. You've not made a great success out of civil engineering, but I do know one thing, he said, that whatever you turn your hand to, you will be a success. And that was the nicest thing, actually, that anybody could say to me at the time, so I was really appreciative. Didn't get the job at the BBC, but there you go.

[0:09:28]
You made a success of your extracurricular theatre, didn't you? And you mentioned a couple of plays that were particularly memorable for you. I just wondered why those two in particular were memorable.

Because I had just joined the drama society and I was given a very, very small part in a play, and it was like a soldier, non-speaking part, crowd scenes and that sort of stuff. A chap who had just joined the university, he'd come from Cambridge, I think, decided he was going to put on a performance of *Much Ado About Nothing*, and cast me in one of the lead roles, which was Benedick, and I was a bit flabbergasted actually, you know, to take on a major part like that. But of course, I enjoyed it, it

went very well. And then we, as a drama society, we put on evenings which were one-act plays of different types, so it went from – what do you call it now? Oh, different kinds of theatre, but including Theatre of the Absurd. And Edward Albee, I came across, and there's a play called *Zoo Story*, and there's only two parts in it, and no set except a bench. So it is all dialogue between these two characters in Central Park, New York. And it's heavy going, it's hard actually, because you've got to learn an awful lot of material. But me and my best mate at the time, David, we put on *Zoo Story* and it was, again, appeared to be very successful. I'm not sure how many times I've performed it now, I think it's three, maybe it's four. Because I did a performance of it, I produced a performance of it in Swansea as well, later. So I've played both parts in the play and it's absolutely superb. If you don't know it, you should read it.

I'll make a point of seeing it now.

It's all about possession. The possession of the park bench, which is, it's good. So those are the ones that stick in my mind, but obviously lots of others as well.

[0:11:48]
Were there any other important influences on your life at this time?

Well, I'm not going to go into my personal life, but yes, there were. But, yes. My girlfriends at the time certainly had an influence.

Okay. I mean, how about did you have any particular friendships, did you make any particular friendships during education days that were to help you in later life, perhaps, and if so, how?

I'm going to say, not really. Although, I mean there are very few people I've stayed in touch with and a couple, one is a married couple, Jeff [ph] and Debbie [ph], yes, they've been, they've had some effect. I think the one though, my best friend at uni was a guy called David, who was a doctor. It was the first year of the opening of the medical school at Nottingham, so he was in the first batch of students going through that medical school. But we were really, really good friends and carried on being so after. Unfortunately, he died probably about six years ago now, possibly more.

[0:13:16]

Okay. So, notwithstanding your lack of enthusiasm for civil engineering, your first job on leaving university was in fact as a civil engineer.

Well, it was because I was thinking of taking, I was effectively taking a year out with the thought that I might just retake my exams. But actually, I didn't retake my exams, so Leeds City Engineers took me on as a trainee engineer, and I was, you know, to the extent that what a trainee engineer does, I think I was reasonably competent. It's funny though, talking about IT, I want to, that particular year, which was 1972 to 1973, was also the year in which local government was being reorganised. And the engineers department were heavily involved in planning for the future, whatever it was, was it Yorkshire Metropolitan County or something? There were lots of committee meetings, you see, so they would have to have papers and stuff drawn up for these meetings. I think there were 20, and I got roped in to helping organise these things. Now, this is what I find fascinating looking back. Today, if you had to have a meeting and share with the committee the new boundaries and placing of, you know, different depots and things like that, it would be relatively easy, wouldn't it? And you could colour code the various components. Now, I spent an awful lot of time with black and white like map printouts on A3, colour washing in with paint, watercolour paint, the pink of the areas included in… and I was thinking, it's unbelievable, isn't it, that you would have people sitting in a room colour washing maps. That's what technology has changed, amongst other things.

Had you, I mean at this point during, you know, during your education, had you had any exposure to computing at all? Was it something…

No.

… that you had any interest in?

Well, there wasn't any. There wasn't any. I mean what I used to do as a kid, I had a vague interest in electronics and if I'd done engineering sensibly, I'd have done electronic engineering, not civil. Because I was a sort of, I used to buy very old

radios, you know, the really big ones with great big speakers, mains radio, from bring and buy sales, and usually they didn't work until I had a go at them and I used to make them work, you see. So I was a bit of a tinkerer with electronics and radio stuff. But computers didn't exist, so no, I had no… In fact, at the Leeds City Engineers department, I did come across computers, but rather remotely as a user, because the way design was done was you would, there would be, for a particular shape of bridge, for instance, like the one I designed, although designing meant actually just designing what the reinforcement was. And to get the reinforcement you ran a stress analysis programme which would come back with where all the stresses were. And then you'd just stick in, and draw in the appropriate steel bars of reinforcement so that it would stand up. So there you are.

Is it still standing today?

Well, d'you know, I don't know. I actually haven't seen it. It was called Ivy Street footbridge. I haven't a clue where it is, I just know it was on the new ring road around Leeds at the time.

[0:17:05]
Anyway, so despite your lack of exposure to anything to do with computing, you moved pretty quickly, after a year with Leeds.

Well, the real story, if you want to know, is my father chucked me out of home. [laughs] I remember him saying – he didn't say a lot – I remember him saying to me one day, 'By the time you're 21, Gareth, I want you out of this house and with a career'. Because I was living at home and commuting to Leeds. And I thought, hm, well there's a challenge. And not knowing quite what to do, but he then thrust a copy of *The Observer* into my hands and said, 'You might be interested in that'. And it was an advert for the Civil Service to train in what was called ADP, Automatic Data Processing. And so I applied and you had to apply, one, to be a civil servant, Executive Officer, and then secondly, a special test done in London on your aptitude for ADP. How they knew what that aptitude was, I'm not quite sure. But I passed that. I said, in my preferences, that I quite liked the sound of Cheltenham as a place to work, but I was kind of more interested in the environment than I was in defence. So

my choice of department was DoE, my choice of location was Cheltenham. Now, this is naïve because of course they then said, don't know what to do with that, we'll send him to Swansea. But that was a fascinating time, if you're interested in context, because you see, late sixties was when the government actually was really very, very bold, very courageous, they took on what was brand new technology, which were the mainframe computers of the time, and massively changed the way in which government administration worked. It actually started in National Insurance records in Newcastle. The next one was DVLC, but there was also Office of Population, Census and Surveys, and the Customs and Excise at Southend. And there was a migration of core expertise from each of those around the country. But to take on the complete transformation of the way that county councils did vehicle and driver licensing, move all that to a centralised system in Swansea in a completely new building, with all the logistics to work out, and brand new systems to be built, I think was amazing, quite staggering. And really, I think, courageous and very, very – what would you say – laudable.

[0:20:03]
And you joined DVLC…

'73.

'73, which was, it was a new organisation then, was it?

Brand new. The systems were still being built, you know, designed, coded, tested. And I can't actually remember which went live first, whether it was drivers or vehicles, I really can't remember. But it was in the run-up to the first live and then – whichever it was – and then the following year, I think it was the following year, they did the other one. And I was in a, well, having trained in COBOL, of course – lovely, lovely – I then went into what you might call a technical services area. It was a halfway house between application building and operations. So I was involved with what was called the Tech Library Suite and the User File Control Package. So you're really into middleware to get the applications to run on the systems that were there. And that was in the days of ICL System 4, that was the mainframe, very similar to the IBM 360 of the time, and we did most of our programming work in user code, which

is equivalent to Assembler, or if you want to get really technical, I also worked on the key to disk systems, which were Honeywell, I think, and Redifon. So there was a programming language called Redifon Map [ph], there was DAP-16. So we were really were in the bowels of IT, but great, great fun.

And what were you… you said, I think, that you were designing software interventions to reduce the number of tape reels.

Well, that was a little… yeah, I was quite pleased with that.

It probably sounds like ancient history to some of our listeners.

Yeah, in reels. And I can't remember, I think it was 200 reels of magnetic tape, big reels were needed for one version, I think it was one version, of the main file. And if you operated grandfather, father, son arrangement, you're talking about a lot of tapes. And of course, they cost money. Now, if you're interested in the detail here, I was working on, I think I was then in Tape Library Suite, I'm not sure. But one of the things that happened was on the driver's file, the way the unique driver identity is designed means that an individual driver may not have a unique identity, because it's, the basis, it's the surname, with the first seven or first five letters of the surname, and date of birth, but mashed up. So if you have the same surname, the same date of birth, you are, as far as the driver system is concerned, a twin, there's more than one of you. And if you look at the distribution of names, when you get to the 'S's and 'T's, the Stevens, Stevensons, Taylors, Turners, and there's another clustering elsewhere, you have a problem if you're dealing with serial processing on tapes, because you have to have all the records with the same key processed in the same period of time, as it were. You can't allow it to change reel in the middle. It has to be on a single reel. Therefore, what the driver system did was that when it – it always did a read ahead to the next record, and if identified it was a twin, they would truncate the preceding block – you remember blocks on tapes? – set of records in a block, and then there was an inter-block gap and then there was another set of records. Now, if you truncate and have another inter-block gap, it means that you are not using the capacity of the reel, because there was a limit on the number of blocks on the wheel. Anyway, it gets very complicated. And I was musing about this, I don't know if it was in the bath or

something, and part of the standard file control processing was to count the number of blocks and then change the reel when it got to 6,500 or something. But it meant that when you had an instance of twinning, you were only using a very small part of the tape, therefore the size of the main file was increased. And I just came up with a brainwave and I thought, I know what, if we use this little field on the file control record as an effective by count, a virtual one, and we put in processing routines to calculate the equivalent amount of tape we've used, you could save a phenomenal amount of reels of tape. The funny thing about this was, and I took this idea – I coded it all up, I did the all the coding required for the tape library suite, I coded up what the interventions, the changes in the macros were as well – and I took it to my boss and I said, David, I've got this idea, we could save a lot of money if we did this. Now, you would have expected, wouldn't you, him to say, that's fantastic Gareth, well done, we'll put you up for a staff suggestion scheme award. No. He ripped a shred off me, because I had encroached on the area of somebody else in this section. Wow. So that taught me a lesson. I'm not sure what it was.

So that wasn't very encouraging.

No, but there we are. Yes.

[0:25:40]
I mean, did you get… was your training on the job or did you get…

I think we had thirteen weeks of training initially. But then after that it was…

That was all about programming and stuff like that?

D'you know, and I think there was a five-week course on user code. Yeah, training was very intensive, it had to be. In fact, I got into then, in subsequent, in the later years at Swansea, running the training courses for – in COBOL – for new entrants. Made an interesting discovery there. People who had done computer science were not as good as the people who had done zoology, or archaeology.

And that was something to do with the way they thought?

I think it is

Or, what's your theory there?

I think it is. I think to be a good analyst and programmer, you have to have a bit of creativity about you, you've got to think of things out of the box. And what I was finding was that those who'd done engineering and computing science were too rigid, they were too process-driven. And so, I've always maintained that. Yes. You know, if you go back centuries and certainly back to Ancient Greeks and stuff, there wasn't this distinction between arts and sciences. And if I go back to my father – you've asked about influences – he was a scientist, he was a really good architect, he was a very good musician – he didn't play anything but his understanding of classical music was fantastic – and he also was able to create beautiful woodwork, you know, inlays and things like that. He built cabinets, wardrobes, you name it, he was very, very good. So he had that combination of perspectives and skills and I think it's sad that people don't these days embrace those two spheres with equal measure.

Did you, I mean did you get any career development at this stage? Were your managers helpful to you in that respect?

No, not really. I remember in the Civil Service they have this thing called Fast Stream and so I was pretty good, I have to say, I was quite a clever youngster, I suppose. And my boss suggested that I be put forward for the Fast Stream, which means you skip grades, it means you get special career support and probably end up as a policy person somewhere. But I objected, I said no, I don't agree with it, it's against my principles. Because my principles were that talent ought to be rewarded at whatever level and stage it is, not you select people out and then groom them, as it were. So I refused it. There was no real career guidance, but I got involved in, while I was doing this technical role in Swansea, in a thing called SCERT – and it's not with a 'k', by the way. It was S-C-E-R-T, which is a system for discrete simulation of computer systems. And it was used in order to judge where you needed to tweak the capacity of performance of your hardware, making hardware, by looking at how the runs were performing. But it was done on the basis of simulation, not of necessarily

of hardware monitoring. And I got involved in running those simulations and an opportunity came up in CCTA – Central Computer and Telecoms Agency. Now, the way this – it gets very technical, doesn't it? The Civil Service is a wonderful thing. I was an Executive Officer, the way it worked was that you had to have a seniority of seven years as an EO before you could be considered for promotion to a Higher Executive Officer. And I wasn't going to hang around that long, that was ridiculous. And for people in the fast moving world of IT, this was just unacceptable. So this opportunity came up in London with CCTA and it was in the field of hardware monitoring and software simulation. And it would have given me a temporary – I think that's right – promotion to Higher Executive Officer. And I was quite attracted to this and I went for the interviews and I got offered the job, but I also applied for a trawl, which was you could get Higher Executive Officer if you moved to London in the Department of Environment and Transport. So, I applied for that as well. I took the CCTA job and then got in touch with the personnel department and said, well look, you said that I could get substantive promotion if I came to London for three years. I am in London, the fact that I'm not working for you, department, is not material. So, they gave me the substantive promotion.

[0:30:56]
So tell me a little bit about the CCTA and what its role was at this time.

I think when I joined , I might be wrong, I think it was called CCA then, Central Computer Agency, and they had responsibility for all funding, it was a central pot for computers in government, all funding and all procurement. So any piece of hardware that was required anywhere in central government, it would go through CCA. And then over a period of years financial delegation was given to individual departments and then procurement was untied from CCTA so departments could do their own thing if they wanted. And of course some of them, like Inland Revenue, did exactly that. But it moved, you see, it started off in one way and then gradually changed and…

So its role changed to be more strategic?

Well, I think to be more strategic. It focussed more on guidance and best practice. So in the middle years that I was there – I mean, by the way, my twelve years at CCTA were absolutely fantastic. They were the most enjoyable years, I… is that true? They felt like the most enjoyable years of my life, because of the freedom it afforded you. You know, if you came up with a good idea and you got the right people behind you, you could do something. And, so those were the years where - then it became CCTA, bringing in telecoms – where they invested in methods. If you think about it, SSADM – Structured Systems Analysis and Design Method – was curated, I think is the right way to put it, because there were other methods like Michael Jackson. Was it Michael Jackson Design Method?

Mm.

Yeah. But they sort of curated and moulded SSADM. There was Prompt, then out of that came Prince and Prince 2. And the IT Infrastructure Library, which was founded, I think on some IBM methods, originally, for management and computer systems. But again, there was a lot of effort put into how do we provide the guidance, the methods, GOSIP – Government OSI Profile – that will help the government scene. So actually, over those years, I would say CCTA and the government was leading the way in deployment of IT in the UK, without a doubt. They were streets ahead. And a couple of things that happened during my period there. One was, now, I'm going to lay claim to this because at the time there was project management, IT project management, there was sort of business strategy in a rather rarefied way, but not much in between. But we also had in CCTA methods – oh actually, this was after I left, I beg your pardon, after I left. Shall I jump around a bit?

Well, I think, I was going to come on to the topic I think you're talking about a bit later. But…

Right, okay. But one of the things that did happen, a key turning point, by the way, in my career, was, there I was doing hardware monitoring, computer system simulation, SCERT simulation, and there was a reorganisation. So I was also doing some support of the consultancy service, which were independent consultants. And I was asked, because of the reorganisation, what do you want to do Gareth, do you want to go into

the technical area and do more hardware monitoring and simulation, or do you want to join the consultancy service fulltime. And I chose the latter. And that of course made a very significant difference to the way things panned out. So I supported the consultancy service in sort of administration, scheduling, supervisory role over engagements, and so on. So these were all consultants drawn from the private sector on loan to CCTA and they were farmed out to government departments.

[0:35:27]

Can you remember what sort of things they were doing?

A lot of them were sort of project reviews, you know, major projects got into difficulty, needed to be reviewed what was going wrong and what the solutions were. A lot were like that. And then later sort of IT strategies and things became more the flavour. But that's about all I can remember from those days. So I was editing reports and things. And that also was of interest to me, because I love the English language and you'd be surprised to know that consultants, management or IT, are not necessarily good at language, written or otherwise. So I'd edit those reports, put together an editor's guide, how do you go about editing reports. And I was very keen to get on. I made it clear that I wanted to do this consultancy stuff. So I became the first civil servant who was given the job as a consultant.

So you actually went out and did consultancy?

Oh yes, I did. I was just given the job. There you are Gareth, you're a consultant now. What? What do I do? And, yes, and so I was just like the others, farmed out. They were generally six to eight-week engagements, whether it was in Edinburgh or Liverpool or wherever. It was very stressful, I have to say. I did thirteen engagements in about a year.

From the sound of it, you didn't get a lot of support.

Well, there wasn't very much. There was support in the sense of some technical information. So if I needed to know about HP250s or something, there was a little cell in CCTA and they would do what they could to help me, because they liaised

with the major hardware manufacturers. But beyond that, nah. So, the one that sticks in my mind – I mean there were loads that did – they were interesting. Two that I'll mention. One was, you may know that there are special hospitals for the criminally insane. There were four: there were two in Liverpool; Park Lane, Moss Side, there's Rampton's and there's Broadmoor. And the task was to document the requirements for a set of applications that could be run locally, and it was things like patient cash, general finance, pharmaceuticals, and so on. And so going round special hospitals, and it's not a pretty sight, doing this peculiar thing of trying to document requirements, I just thought was out of this world. And you hit some interesting things, like at one, I think this was Rampton. Rampton had been going through a lot of bad times actually, it had a lot of bad publicity. And I went there and I was talking to what they call the Chief Nursing Officer, which actually means Chief Security Officer, you know, they wear uniforms, carry bunches of keys around. And I said to him, you know – he told me he's got ten per cent turnover – so ten per cent of the nursing staff are new every year, and I said, so how are you finding the move towards more supportive nursing, rather than just lock 'em up, as it were. I didn't say that, but that was the meaning.   And he said, well, he said, I've got a hundred staff, I get ten new every year and they all come in chipper and wanting to do good. And he said, you know what, after two weeks they're all like the other ones. Now, there's an interesting exercise in change management. You've got to do more than just bring in fresh blood. And the other thing I remember, I was talking to a guy who was running pharmaceuticals – I think this was at Broadmoor – and he just said, we don't need a system. And I said, well, you do lots of dispensing. Yeah, he said, but look at this. And he showed me, ninety per cent of what they bought was Largactil, just a tranquilliser. He says, I don't need a system for that. Lots of good learning though. Natural History Museum was another one I did.

Sounds fascinating.

It was, it was amazing. Really interesting.

And a great education as well, I should think?

Well, you learn, because you learn on your feet.

[0:40:12]

And you did a period, you were on the steering committee for the Naval IT Strategy, I think, at…

NITS, as we call it. In fact we had a commemorative tie with emblems of lice on the Navy background.

Lice?

NITS. Naval IT Strategy.

I see.

It was called the NITS study. Yes.

Alright. But I'm quite interested in the fact that I think that then led to you becoming Head of the IS Strategy Unit at CCTA, did it?

Well, I'm not sure what the origins of all that were. My boss, Colin Mews [ph], who was an excellent boss, by the way, they'd kind of decided, and it was probably Treasury Expenditure Divisions and CCTA, they had a concern about the lack of strategic thinking in the way that IT was being invested in. And they had this notion of we ought to have strategies for IT, or IS as we called it then, Information Systems. But no one seemed to know how to do it. I remember going to see a guy who was at the Civil Service College who ran a course on IT strategy, and I said, well, what's the method? And what he described to me wasn't a method at all. It was kind of like a magic process of putting lots of ideas in a bucket and somehow coming out with something sensible. So Colin asked me to set up and head what was called the IS Strategy Unit in CCTA. We had two missions. I can't remember how many people we had in the team – three, four, maybe? Two missions. One, to develop comprehensive guidance on how to develop IS strategy. And that was going to be the flagship of the IS guides that CCTA were in the process of developing, and publishing. And alongside it was the need for a different set of guidance, and this was

guidance to steering committee members. So, all departments had steering committees, IT strategy steering committees. And the chairs of those steering committees were usually without much knowledge of IT, they were policy and business. And to expect them to steer, monitor and evaluate IS strategies was asking a lot. Now, the directors of these steering committees and the IT directors gathered together at a regular meeting called ComCon – can't remember what it stood for. So one of the tasks that I was given in the middle of that year was to develop some guidance for steering committees and steering committee chairs. And I led that with a colleague called Callum. We had a very fixed timescale, we had thirteen weeks – soup to finish. All the thinking had to be done, and a document produced, and it was, I was really proud of it, actually. It was a document that was issued at ComCon as we agreed, we had put together a complete framework for how to go about designing and delivering IS strategies, most importantly we took each deliverable through an IS strategy development process, identified what it was, when it's produced and then its significance in the scheme of things, and lastly, issues for the IS steering committee. In other words, if you like, this is your checklist of questions you ask when you're being presented with the IS strategy developed by your IT function or whatever. I'm really pleased about this. The great shame that it was never published by commercial publishers, because it was a thirteen-week exercise we got a lady called Jane to do the management of it and she went to a local printers. So there's no ISBN number, but I think it's one of the best publications. And you know what? That, the strategic planning for information systems, which was the big guide, which I was lead author on, and I have to say, there were contributions from Callum, from Dave and from a consultant called Nigel Brooks, but a lot of the content was developed as we did this, because as went through this process, we could see what was needed in strategy development. That guide, which was published in – when would it be – 1989, if my maths is correct, that's thirty years ago, isn't it? It is still being used and taught in major universities on computer science courses. And that, I think, is quite a remarkable achievement.

Well, I'm hoping we might get a copy of these documents, if you're…

Yes, by all means. Just one observation, of course. Remember when these were produced, so we haven't got soft copies, there weren't any. But you're very welcome, I can certainly give you the guidelines one and if it's a matter of scanning the pages…

Okay, well, we'll do what we can.

[0:46:05]
So moving on then, in 1990 you made a move into the private sector, joining…

Yeah, there was one thing before that. So at the end, about 1989 after I published the strategy stuff, I was getting a little bit itchy to leave, and it wasn't because I didn't enjoy life, it was because I couldn't afford to stay being a civil servant. I was living in a flat with wife and daughter, it was a one and a quarter bedroom flat and I couldn't see any way that I was going to be able to find a house. So, needs must. So I did lots of applications to lots of companies and got lots and lots of offers, which was very nice. Helped enormously by my role on IS strategy. However, when I mentioned it to my boss, Colin, he said, mm. And actually when I got back from holiday there was a letter waiting for me saying, I would much rather you didn't leave, please will you stay on a minimum until May next year – so this would be about nine months extra – and I will give you grade 6, rather than being grade 7. So I decided to do exactly that. So I headed up what was then called the Strategic Issues Group, so it had rather more in it than just the IS Strategy Unit. We had Women into IT as a campaign, or programme which I also was responsible for, computer and office systems planning. So it was a broader portfolio. And very importantly in that period was to drive out – not drive out, drive in – the strategic planning approaches into government departments. So I hosted major workshops and stuff where we went through the material. We had to lobby with the consultancy industry to get them to conform to the approaches which we had developed. So, as I say, I had a few offers outstanding. At the end of, well, during that nine months to a year period, only one of them stayed in touch and it happened to be Arthur Young, but then Arthur Young became Ernst & Young before I got round to joining them.

By merging with Ernst & Whinney.

They did indeed. So that's why I ended up there.

[0:48:32]
Right, okay. So you did actually – I was going to ask you, you know, were you poached or something, because of your expertise from the CCTA, but obviously they were interested in that, but…

Yes, there was some of that.

… but you did go through a standard application process.

Yeah, but it was that that I, I think in their eyes I would have been a good catch for their business. But of course there were embargoes. I wasn't allowed to be involved in any government business development, or business development to government departments. I think it was for a year, I mean it was quite onerous.

Okay. But you joined the – I can't remember what it's called…

It was called Public Services, which was actually very focussed on healthcare at the time. But quite a small unit and there were two major legs in it, one of which was, if you like, performance improvement or business process stuff, and the other, which was less developed, was IT related. So, that's what I joined, as a managing consultant, and it was only about a year afterwards, maybe two, that my boss, as it were, Dick, left and leaving a vacancy which I was very pleased to fill. So I got promotion quite quickly and then led all the efforts of Ernst & Young consulting which related to information systems to public sector.

And you won your first consultancy engagement at the, what was then called the DSS, the Department for Social Security.

Yes.

How did that…

I think it was my first. I'm sure it was very early on. And I'm not quite sure how it stacks up with the embargo I just mentioned, but there you go. Yes, it was. DSS, they were, again, if one goes back in time, this was after Next Steps so the department had been broken up into executive agencies.

Next Steps was what? Sorry, just remind me.

It was all about the creation of executive agencies. Next Steps for something, I can't remember what it was. But the idea was to slim down the centre of departments and make them all policy focussed and having anything which was administratively execution put under an executive agency status, which gave them some independence. And there were a number, there was Benefits Agency, there was Contributions in DSS, Contributions Agency, War Pensions Agency.   Probably missed one. And of course the problem that the department then was wrestling with was how on earth, if they're executive agencies and have the freedom to do what they want, how on earth can we have a coherent infrastructure and information systems strategy. So I put together quite a lot of stuff in the end of my CCTA days on corporate IS strategy, it was saying how do you deal with that problem of overarching standardisation control, etc, while at the same time enabling independent, so-called independent business units to do their own thing. And that was what the DSS was involved in and why I got involved in that, I won that piece of work and I'm not sure what we were supposed to deliver, but I'm sure the team did very well. [laughs]

[0:52:28]
And was the one that you won after going on a particular training course?

No, no that was later.

That was later?

That was when I was a partner, I think. So that was later.

Well, tell me about that.

Well, this again, major turning point for me, this really was. So, to give you the full story of this, our practice leader – this was Public Services group I was in then, this was before I set up the Transport Sector – Public Services, and our leading partner one day at our partners meeting said, I've been doing some analysis. It seems to me the following. If there's anything going on in government which requires consultancy, financial consultancy, they always ask us, we always get invited. This is the day before catalogues and procurement constraints and that sort of stuff. We always get invited, and he said, and we write our proposals and we always get invited to interview. And then, he said, we keep coming second. My deduction, he said is, that we write pretty good proposals but we're not very good at presentation. And he, through learning and development at EY commissioned some training for the Public Services group on presentation skills, loosely. And everybody went on it and I went on the course. It was the week preceding the most important presentation of my life. I looked after DSS, this was an account along with MAFF, MoD and others. And the DSS had been going through a procurement, limiting the number of suppliers from hundreds to very, very few, so it was a framework procurement. If we didn't get on that, then all our business would come to a shuddering halt, and my career probably with it. We had put together, we'd obviously submitted a very, very good piece of proposal work, by a guy called Martin [ph]. And the week before I went on this presentation skills course, and it completely bowled me over. This course was run by a guy called William Macnair, a Scot, and it was unlike any training course I've been on. I think you went on it, Ian?

I did. I still remember it now.

And he was just amazing. He was the most learned person I've ever come across. He could speak virtually any language you could throw at him, as I discovered by people coming on courses subsequently from different parts of the world and he could almost always have a conversation with them. A very interesting man, he'd been a British spy in East Germany, historian, trained as a lawyer. The thing is, you went on the course and it was littered – and this is not a very good word, is it? Anyway. It was laced with references to neuroscience, to psychology, to anthropology, to military tactics. You name it, there was something in there. And I found the whole thing just so exciting. And of course the core of it was rhetoric, ie, it was the Classics. And he

had his little book of Cicero, one page in Latin, the other in English. But I just found that amazingly interesting. It was a brilliant course, the core of it was the thing called the 'Kipper', a tool for the design and delivery of spoken word messages, ie, presentations. Now, I was so bowled over by this, on the Friday – I think it was a Wednesday and Thursday course, something like that – on the Friday I went into the office and I got the lead partner, Alan, and my colleague and good friend, Bill, into the room and I said look, just been on this course, this is what I want to happen. Bill, I want two hours of your time this afternoon and we're going to work out seven words, because we're going to define what our big idea is. I'm going to spend the weekend creating, drafting the message, according to the Kipper. When it comes to our presentation on Monday – I think it was Monday, it may have been Tuesday – I am going to give the presentation, you two guys are there to give me some moral support but actually to be there for the important part, which is the discussion after the presentation. And they all agreed. And that's what we did and I threw away the PowerPoint that I'd put together beforehand. We did have PowerPoint, even then. And that's what we did, and we won a framework. Now, the point is, after going on a course I actually used it within hours, and it worked so well, I know that Bill Cook [ph] – he's retired now – but Bill has said to others, he said it was the best presentation he's ever heard in his life. And that is testimony from Bill.

Okay. And this had a big bearing on your later career, which we'll come back to…

Yes, it did.

… a bit later on. But I want to come back to something you almost touched on earlier.

Okay.

I got a sense you were going to start talking about programme management, I think.

Yeah, that was interesting.

[0:57:56]

So tell us a little bit about that.

I left CCTA, having developed the guidance on IS strategy, on planning and so on, and I'd also been on the Prince board, Prince enhancement project board and so on, so I had a reasonable knowledge of methods and tools at the upper end, as it were. I wasn't particularly knowledgeable about ITIL and so on, but I'd dabbled in that. And there were certain parts of CCTA, again, very active in methods, and a guy called Tony Betts who was concerned about the way in which all these methods that CCTA had sponsored, how they fitted together. And no one really knew, because people would know only pockets. So he commissioned a consultancy exercise, which of course I bid for, from EY, and won. It was called, I think, Business Area Planning, or that was a working title. But it was basically, can you sort out how all these methods fit together. Now, I got a consultant in called David Fersht [ph], and I have to say, he did most of the donkey work, he did. But I put together a sort of framework of tracking through all the methods, did they deal with feasibility, did they deal with finance and affordability, business cases, etc, architecture and so on. And was able to demonstrate that there was a big, big gap between IS strategy and management and technical policies and projects. Now, I think the view was that what we would do is have strategies for business areas. And I looked at it all and I said, no, it isn't that at all. What's missing is the concept of a program. Let me define what a programme is, and I think I came up with a definition of it is a set of related projects and activities constituted to achieve a particular business outcome. That's what it was. And I put in that, what was called the Business Area Planning Report, I put a lot of stuff in about what programme management, or programme planning – it was more about planning – was. And I think that was a major achievement. I don't believe, and I have no recollection of the term programme, programme planning or managing existing at the time, it was a completely new concept.

[1:00:31]

The big consultancies, the major consultancies at this time, were quite into developing their own comprehensive information systems and process improvement methodologies.

Yes, they were.

I mean E&Y had Navigator, didn't it, which became Fusion later.

Yeah. And Coopers had Summit. In fact I was offered a job at Coopers in the
Summit team.

*So was there any synergy between, that was going on in a different part of E&Y
wasn't it?*

Yeah. I mean, as you remember, Navigator was more about how do you manage- it
was a bit like programme management actually. And it had elements of IS strategy,
which was a thing called Improvement Portfolio Development at the front end. So a
lot of stuff being developed then in the States and rolled into Europe, UK. The other
methods that were around, CSC had some methods, Data Logic did, I think. Certainly
Coopers did, because when I was at CCTA we got presentations in Prompt. And PA
did. Can't remember what PA's was called. The problem was, that most of them had
been derived from data management. So the concept of data management had been
stretched up, so both Summit and the PA method were like that. I'm not knocking
them, that's fine, but actually the approach we had taken was a top-down one. It was
from, what the hell is this department trying to achieve, and then coming down. So
they were all- and also, the companies were trying very hard to have their own
intellectual property associated with their approach, and what from CCTA we were
doing was to say, no, we want you all to adopt the same approaches and standards.
Though you can have different tools to support, don't mind that, but they've got to
conform with the deliverables that we've defined. And I think that that did eventually
penetrate and most of those purely data driven approaches died a death. And then it
was more the Navigator style of things.

*And then the CCTA approach evolved into what is now known as MSP or Managing
Successful Programmes.. Is that right?*

What, for strategy, or programme management?

For programme management.

If you take the programme management link, what happened there, after my doing this Business Area Planning piece of work, CCTA then let a contract to develop programme management guidance, and they decided not to give it to Ernst & Young for some strange reason, and gave it to another company - I couldn't name who it was – and it was kind of ironic that the person they'd given it to then rang me up and said, what's this programme management thing all about. But it happens, doesn't it? So yes, there was a guide produced on programme management, I think you're right, subsequent iterations would have led to MSP approaches, I think.

I mention that because, you know, we now have thousands of people who are certified MSP practitioners.

Yep, yep.

It's a link to the present.

It certainly is.

It was the origins of all of that.

Yes, it was.

[1:04:03]
Okay. So, round about 2001 you transitioned into Capgemini, and this was because…

Yeah, if you go back a bit, actually. Let me just roll the clock back, because in Ernst & Young, in '97, I had been working a lot on railways privatisation, by the way, not that I agree with railways privatisation. But the issue was of course breaking up a single organisation into eighty-odd – I can't remember how many there were now – successor bodies. You had Railtrack potentially being floated, you had the operator companies wanting their own systems, you had the need for some kind of central control, so there was the Association of Train Operators, because without it

timetabling doesn't work and things. So there was a heck of a lot of work in disentangling the information systems landscape. Now, Ernst & Young won that contract for the Department for Transport and I wasn't with it right from the start, but I did get involved as partner in charge. And I became quite fascinated with railways, as you would, and I thought it was a really, I couldn't understand why we had no sector focus on transport within consulting. And of course I mentioned it to someone and they said, well, if you want to do it, you do it Gareth. So it was a fascinating period of working out, okay, transport, what is it as a market sector, how does it break down. Working out a strategy – by the way, I only had half a resource for the first year working with me, a guy called John – and then recruiting the right sorts of people, given the target that we were looking at, then having the surprise that what I thought was the best target in the sector, they weren't. In other words, I thought that the big money was going to be in operators rather than infrastructure and would be with passenger rather than freight. The first job we won was P&O Nedlloyd, shipping freight. I then did a piece with British Airways World Cargo, freight. Railtrack became a really, really big client subsequently. Infrastructure. So, we'd done the strategic analysis, we just drew the wrong conclusions. But, adjusted. So yes, so the transport sector I grew in Ernst & Young, I had three years of it, and it was doing pretty well. So when we were, we sold our business to Capgemini, the question was, well, Capgemini did quite a bit of transport stuff and were pretty good at it, so how are we going to take this combined thing forward. And I was given the job in Ernst & Young of Head of Transport, Travel and Business Services. So we had some interesting other clients as well. And I ran that for the first, a year or so, and I have to say, we'd done very, very well, we really did, well, we'd grown enormously. I mean to give you a sense of it, is when I went over there, I think my revenue target for the year was 65 million, something like that. So it wasn't insubstantial. However, of course, the Twin Towers happened in 2001 and virtually all work, in fact at the time we were doing a sort of marriage brokering between British Airways and American Airlines. But of course that happened and everything stopped. So my team was somewhat decimated and I was asked to run a very big bid. It was the biggest bid that Capgemini Group had ever contemplated.

This was outsourcing of some sort?

[1:08:27]

It was an outsourcing. It was valued at over three billion. And I remember the day, actually. I'd been saying, we need a partner, a VP to lead the charge. I remember seeing Andrew, who was Head of Sales and Marketing, yeah, in the company, and my boss, who was then Paul Thorley, and they wandered over to my desk in the open plan office, and they said, 'Gareth, we've been thinking. We think you should lead this bid'. And I'm not quite sure what I said. I know what I felt. I said, what do I know about outsourcing? I'm from a management consulting background. And two, I've never led a big bid. And they just said, yeah, we think you're ideal. [laughs] And of course, the funny thing was, we did a pretty good fist. It was having to work right across the company.

Was this a private sector client or a public sector?

No, it was, hm, halfway house. It was a halfway house one. And we got through the initial sifts and everything else and they were about to shortlist down to three, I think, something like that, and I was on holiday in Arizona at the time and I got the message that we had not made the cut. And my first sensation of course was great disappointment. But let me explain actually what then happened. We had a debrief with the procurement director, Mr Reed [ph], who was a very nice man actually and very sensible, honest and so on, and I had seen him obviously a few times in the run-up to this. And we had an official debrief in the Capgemini offices and it was a bit tense and it got to the end and I turned to the procurement guy and I said, look, do you fancy coming for a pizza? He said, yeah, okay then. So we wandered off and had a pizza and probably a bottle of wine as well. And I said to him, I said look, what went on here, why did we lose? And he said, you were too expensive, you were twenty-five per cent more expensive than the other three, for reasons I now fully understand, by the way. But I said… oh yes, and then he said, and you must understand, this is a scrapyard outsourcing. That was the phrase he used. And I said, but the prospectus was all about partnership and stuff. He said yeah, but that was the prospectus, the reality is, that was a scrapyard outsourcing, and that's not what you do in Capgemini, is it?

[1:11:28]

I haven't heard that term before, what…

It basically means chuck it all out and do it really cheaply. Now, yes I got torn a shred off by my chief executive for wasting three-quarters of a million pounds' worth of money, as he put it, but my view was that what John, the procurement guy had saved us from, was several million pounds' worth of spend in due diligence. So as far as I was concerned, that was a win, that was the right decision and I owe a debt of gratitude that we weren't selected. The company that went on to win that, by the way, lost an awful lot of money on it. So sometimes it's important to know when to back out, sometimes it's very useful to lose. It's not just about winning all the time.

And that's the learning you took away from that, was it?

Absolutely. Qualification, qualification, qualification.

Was that the, would you say that was the biggest failure of your career?

It's not a failure.

Alright. Well, okay. Biggest learning point of your career?

[1:12:34]

Well, it was one of the two big learning points, because there was another one, which was also a very, very big outsourcing contract in government, where I know that the evaluation team at the department had chosen us. I have a very well informed opinion that the reason we lost was because of political interference. This was, I believe, a ministerial decision. Now, I can understand why it was made, but it leaves a bad taste in your mouth when you realise that actually there was something – or two things – entirely out of our control that meant that we were going to lose. But, you know, I don't think of these as failures. There's a very interesting TED talk – is it a TED talk or is it an RSA? – by Simon Sinek, called 'Nobody Wins'. And one of the points he makes about leadership is that good leaders play the infinite game, they don't play the finite game. And finite games are all about trying to win the next deal, beating the

competition. The infinite game is about sustaining the game for as long as you can.
And it's a different mindset. I'm in the latter.

[1:14:03]

*So what overall, talking about your IT career that you've just been describing, what
would you say would be your key successes and to what do you owe your success?*

Well, the strategic planning one, I think was obviously a high point. I mentioned that
business about tapes and reels. Okay, in the theme of things it's not massive, but
being able to make a leap of creativity and come up with a solution that was workable,
I was really proud of.

*So none of the later stuff where you were dealing with big winning, large consultancy
assignments and so on.*

Well yes, in a sense. You see, running– what I didn't say, after that particular deal, I
was sales director for six months at a thing called Government Transportation
Services where we hit all our sales targets in six months. In fact, I think the target
was 320 million in sales, that gives you a sense of the size. Then I was asked to take
over public sector and ran that sector for three or four years. Now, in that period of
time – and this is not all down to me, by the way, because a lot of the early work after
the merger with Capgemini, was done by Bill Cook [ph] and Martin Cook [ph] – but
taking about twenty million pounds' worth of revenues in public sector, which is the
sum of all those component parts of Gemini, Ernst & Young and Capgemini, up to
three-quarters of a billion in three years. Well, that's quite staggering, isn't it? And,
as I say, I don't take credit for that, but sustaining the growth in public sector. So if
you excluded the big Inland Revenue account, I was running more than half of the UK
business, purely because it was public sector. But, you know, would you regard that
as a…? It is an achievement, it's playing the long game again, and what I had to do
over that period of time was to bat off the short-termism that so often creeps into big
companies. Because that's not the way you deal with sector and growth, particularly
in public sector, because it's all based on reputation.

Including in big consultancies, you say, short-termism, it's an issue?

It is, and I knew from the way we'd built the Railtrack account how a good piece of work ricochets out, other people are involved and then that other person, like it happened with, we did something on, second opinion on, I think it was Booz Allen Hamilton, report on Railtrack performance. We did a second opinion. The chief executive obviously got involved and he thought this is a really good piece of work, we like Ernst & Young. That ricocheted into a regulatory review thing, which ricocheted into something else. And I drew up a map of how the work that we had done, because it had been excellent always, in my view, you know, cascaded and cascaded so that we became a trusted adviser to Railtrack. Exactly the same thing happened in DSS and DWP. In fact, to quote if I may, this is when I was running public sector, I was at a dinner and the group CIO was sitting next to me. And I broached with him during discussion, I said, oh well, one of the things we really would like to do is extend our reach into more of the IT area rather than the sort of strategic consultancy stuff, and he looked at me and he said, oh don't do that, Gareth, please don't do that. We regard you as our trusted advisers. And you see, the trouble is, you can't really combine a status as a trusted adviser with heavy lifting, as we call it. You asked me what my achievements, well I have to say the strategic planning thing sticks out. I've had lots of fun doing other stuff. Creating creative teams and keeping people motivated.

[1:18:38]
Well, I get the sense that you've always been a good team worker and team manager.

I don't know whether I'm good, Ian. I have a particular attitude, which is not necessarily the same as other people. I like to look after my people and I also believe in diversity, ie, if you have a team of people, each one can play a different role within that team and to try and measure them all against the same yardstick and give some people promotions and bonuses and some not, I find that really unhelpful. So it is about team. But I'm going to divert very slightly – you can stop me if you wish – but during my period at Ernst & Young I was sitting down with my boss, who was then head of consulting, and he had a spreadsheet and he went through all the things I had to achieve in the following year, all these numbers and percentages and stuff, all very tedious. And he got to the end and I thought, well, that's it then. And he said, okay,

now, what else are you going to do, Gareth? This was the beginning of 2003. And I said, what do you mean, what else? And he said, well, what else are you going to do for the corporate good? And I said, well, put it this way, I am of the view that our skills in putting over ideas in Capgemini are rock bottom, they're not good, and it's not been helped by the fact that we've had three different cultures and approaches of Gemini, Capgemini, Ernst & Young smashed together and they're not consistent. And it's all about pitches, presentations. And he said, well, sort it then. Now, again, it's not often you have a manager saying to you almost no constraint on budget, just sort it out. So I got in touch with William Macnair and I said, Willie, I think I might have some work for you. And we co-designed a training course based around the Kipper for team presentations, pitches. We started it in 2003, I became the exec sponsor in Capgemini and I worked out what the strategy should be, ie, who do you hit first and who do you hit second, what do you then do to make sure it was done in a sensible manner. And that ran and ran and ran, it was regarded as a very good course. Because of the design it required someone else to help out on day two. So the day Willie and I did it was that he would do day one and I would – we'd split into groups – and I'd do one group, he would do another on day two. And that model, that format carried on. But it also meant that I got more and more immersed and interested in spoken word messages, design and so on, to such an extent that I thought, when I decided I did want to leave corporate life, that's what I wanted to do.

[1:21:53]
Which brings us neatly on to your post-IT career, which has been exactly in this area, hasn't it?

It has. I wasn't sure what it was going to be, Ian. I left and I thought, well, I could do some consulting, I could do some coaching. One of the things, by the way, I love doing and very relevant to IT is bid coaching. I've done over the last, well now it's eleven years isn't it, and it's been a bit peaky and troughy, I've done well over twenty support to major bids. It was helping the bid teams get their messaging right and designing the presentation and then coaching the team to deliver a good presentation. And the hit rate has been pretty damn good. I've done two this year for different companies and both have come in. I say come in, but ultimately came in because one didn't come in on the first round, as it were. But in all cases they've commented, the

clients have commented on the, it's the presentation which has put the company over the line and got them the work. So yes, I do a lot of training. It's more than presentation. One of the cornerstones is a programme I run called 'Being a Compelling Consultant' and the recipients of those courses tend to be, well, they're mainly IT now, I do very little with management consulting. So they are full spectrum of age and seniority, from apprentices and graduate trainees in technology through to senior level and executive staff. I, yeah, I love it. Absolutely love it. And it's not because I like being at the front of a group of people, don't get me wrong, because my belief is that a trainer, it's not about you, it's about your delegates, it's about the group. But the sort of feedback that I get is – sounds like I'm bragging – but it's what makes me get up in the morning. It's excellent and I intend for it to carry on being excellent. I want to say one other thing about this though, about the work on rhetoric, message design, because it occurred to me that it actually goes right back to my schooldays, and I did say to you that I was kind of torn at school between the draw of the arts and the draw of the sciences, because schooling and education tends to split them. If you look at what rhetoric is, it is a perfect blend of two things: a love of language and engineering, because it's about structure. And it occurred to me a couple of years ago that I've found myself in the last part of my life, as it were, later part of my life, blending those two things together, which I'd always wanted to from a young age.

[1:24:59]
Yeah, that's interesting. I was going to ask you whether your experience in the IT industry contributed to your later career?

Oh, very much so, because…

And I think they're structural…

Oh yeah, but IT services are my client base. That's primarily…

But this idea of structure. I mean IT forces you to be structural almost, doesn't it?

Yes, but you remember me saying earlier on though, of its own it doesn't actually win you stuff. It's the combination of creativity and discipline, and you put those two together, then it does, it's great fun and very rewarding.

[1:25:36]
What about your interest in the arts, do you maintain that?

Well, I did, for a period. So, well, when I was at Swansea, for instance, I belonged to a local theatre, the Swansea Little Theatre, I've done stuff with the City Lit and so on. Of course, being a consultant it's completely incompatible with doing theatre, you just can't do it. Because you can't commit to rehearsals and schedules and performances, so unfortunately, I had to stop doing that. But, you know, putting over ideas is a performance. Again, one of my mantras is, it's not acting but it is a performance. It's a performance on behalf of your audience. And all that theatre stuff, of course, is enormously helpful. So I could say I learned more not getting my degree in civil engineering [laughs] to help me in later life than I would have done had I done it.

[1:26:36]
Gareth, I understand that during your time at Capgemini you got involved in Intellect.

Yes, I did.

An important group for commerce and industry. Tell us a bit more about that.

Intellect – I can't remember what they used to be called, something, Computer Software Services Association or something, but they became Intellect under the very expert steerage of John Higgins, who is the Director-General. And I'm not quite sure how it came about, but this would be about 2003/4, there was a lot of concern in government and generally, a lot of money was being spent in IT, but not often with glorious success. And there was a sensation that perhaps the industry was not being as co-operative as it should be and maybe government wasn't being as joined up as it should be. What Intellect put together was a thing called the Public Sector Council, which was a fascinating group. If you can imagine going to a meeting – and regular meetings – where the people round the table were your competitors. In other words,

there would be one person from, I don't know, Fujitsu, one person from BT, one person from Steria, one person from Accenture and so on, and one person from Capgemini. And it happened to be me because I was running public sector and that's what the Public Sector Council was focussed on. The idea behind it was that although we were competitors, we ought to co-operate and collaborate in ways which would be of benefit to government IT. And therefore we worked closely with the government CIO, OGC and similar. We put together guidance, for instance, you will be aware perhaps of the role of Senior Responsible Owner in government, which was a co-operation with industry and government. Intellect, we put together a corollary which was the role of the senior responsible industry executive. It was how should industry face off to government in a co-operative manner. A lot of good stuff was done and we even put together a code of conduct for companies to sign up to in their dealings with government clients. There were then other initiatives, coming from OGC actually, on cost reduction, for instance, and we co-operated very closely with them. I understand that that kind of relationship between the technology trade association, which is effectively what it is, in government, it has not maintained the quality of relationship and in fact the damage really was done when the coalition government came in. Which is a great shame, because it seems to me that you, you know, we're not going to be blindly trusting, are we, but at the same time there has to be honesty, there has to be straight talking, and that's what it did. Now, I was the - that was the Public Sector Council – I was elected as a vice-president and carried on as vice-president for several years. And indeed, when I left Capgemini and therefore had to stand down, I was still regarded as a member of the Public Sector Council on an honorary basis, which I carried on for some time. So yes, I think it did very good stuff. I would love, I don't know whether Tech UK have managed to reach out again and re-establish contact, because I'm not particularly close to what they do now.

[1:30:36]
And what do you think are the biggest challenges and opportunities for the IT industry in the next ten years, say?

I can give you one answer, and then I'll give you another one. What I come across now, dealing with people who are in the technology space; they might be SAP practitioners or Salesforce.com, or Oracle or whatever. By the way, this includes my

visits to India, I do a visit to India every year, and again, it's training but you get an awful lot back of the issues. I would say the problem at the moment, the key one, is coping with complexity and it's complexity in the technology landscape. So much opportunity is available, in a way, to solve problems in interesting ways that it means that anybody who has to act as an adviser needs access to a massively broad base of understanding. And that is acting as quite a shock to people who have grown up being certain about what they did. They work in a particular area, I know this bid, I'm a functional consultant, I know this bid, so I can advise my clients as an expert. But you see, clients now want something different. They want, yeah, yeah, yeah, but, you know, what we really want to know is, where are we going and how do we get there. You know, it's back to strategy planning, back to the old days, with a slightly different approach. But I think it's a challenge for individuals working in the sector, how can they become the, have such a broad base to be effective advisers. The other thing that I think is a challenge, it is about plotting the way forward and I'm minded of something we did when I was at Ernst & Young. There was an organisation called Cable who, amongst other things, published a government computing magazine and also ran conferences. And the guy who headed up Cable, William Heath, approached – I knew quite well – he approached us and asked us if we could sponsor initiative that he was engaged in. Now, this is back in 1994, and he said what they wanted to do was to put together a sort of research-based futuristic view of how might IT be used in five years' time. Because it was changing massively quickly then, and we called this publication 'Wired Whitehall 1999'. It seems an awfully long ago, doesn't it? But it was done five years before that in '94. And there's some very interesting stuff in there. It talks about the creation of a citizen's account, so that each citizen would have access to the range of government services. Again, technology's moved on, but the principles that were written down there in 1994 still persist. I think there's a section in there on the impact of technology on democracy. So I think, you know, one can learn from history. It's a good read. But of course, the world has moved on quite a bit.

[1:33:58]

And what advice would you give someone entering the IT industry today?

Plan your career. That's what I say to them. In other words, you can go down the expert road. You can become a deep expert in something and be recognised and valued for it. But beware, technology's going on so fast now that that expertise might become less relevant in the future. But if you don't get an expertise and you go for a more generalist role, you'll never really understand what's at the heart of this whole thing. I mean my background in doing middleware programming and support at DVLC in 1973/4, it's still relevant to the way one looks at technology and its use today. And without that grounding, I think it would be very difficult to be effective as a trusted adviser. But you've got to decide when do you move between those different domains. So, plan your career, that's what I would say.

Okay, that's great. Well, thanks Gareth. It's been fascinating hearing about your career and your involvement in some of the strategic developments underlining public sector computing. On behalf of Archives IT, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us.

It's been a great pleasure, Ian.

[1:35:26 recording ends]