

Tom Povey Access Summary

Thomas Francis Povey, born in 1952, joined DEC in 1983 after a career in computing and standards work. He contributed to DEC's all-in-one version 2 and DEC Forms, a layered product that became DEC's fastest-selling layered product. Povey highlighted DEC's innovative culture, particularly in networking and electronic communication, and its commitment to standards. He noted DEC's growth from 60,000 to 220,000 employees by 1990, which diluted the culture. Povey left DEC in 1993 due to a changing culture and redundancy offers, later co-founding a company to improve VT100 software. He reflected on DEC's legacy in networking and communication.

Outline

Early Life and Education of Thomas Francis Povey

- Gavin Clark introduces the interview with Thomas Francis Povey, who was born in Boston, Lincolnshire, in 1952.
- Thomas describes his early life, mentioning he was an only child and had limited interaction with his father.
- He attended grammar school a year early and struggled academically, eventually going to Plymouth Polytechnic to study a three-part degree in math, statistics, and computing.
- Thomas wrote his first program on a PDP and decided to pursue a degree in computing over mathematics for better job prospects.

Transition to Brunel University and Early Career

- Thomas moved to London and attended Brunel University, where he did a computer science degree from 1972 to 1976, including two industrial placements with Burroughs Corporation.
- He relocated to Scotland with Burroughs and was indirectly introduced to DEC through a standards committee meeting.
- Thomas met Dan France from DEC at a standards group meeting in Boston, Massachusetts, and they shared similar ideas about screen management.
- He applied for a job at DEC, was accepted, and started working on the all-in-one version 2 project by 1985.

Interests and Early Computing Experiences

- Thomas was good at mathematics and enjoyed sports, spending a lot of time in the gym and learning card games.
- He discovered computing at Plymouth Polytechnic, where he wrote his first program on a PDP.
- Thomas describes the process of writing code on coding sheets, using typists to generate punch cards, and running programs on a computer.

- He recalls a program he wrote to find the longest palindrome and another program that was too big for the ICL 1900, which he ran at Imperial College.

Joining DEC and Initial Impressions

- Thomas joined DEC in 1983 and describes the company culture as welcoming and exciting, especially compared to the more staid environment at Burroughs.
- He describes DEC Park 1 and 2, noting the open-plan layout and the "street" that connected the buildings.
- Thomas mentions the importance of standards work and DEC's involvement in standards committees, particularly the COBOL standards group.
- He discusses the screen management task group and the development of the forms interface management system.

DEC's Involvement in Standards and Company Culture

- Thomas explains the importance of standards for DEC, noting the company's support for standards and its representation on standards committees.
- He describes the company's growth from around 60,000 employees in 1980 to 220,000 by 1990, which diluted the company culture.
- Thomas highlights DEC's focus on listening to users and supporting standards, which he believes was one of the company's downfalls.
- He discusses the development of the all-in-one product and the challenges of managing customizations and upgrades.

Work on All-in-One and Midnight Projects

- Thomas worked on the all-in-one product, which was initially developed in Charlotte, North Carolina, and later managed by the Reading team.
- He describes the development of the all-in-one version 2 and the challenges of meeting customer expectations.
- Thomas mentions the concept of "midnight projects," where engineers could work on their own ideas outside of their regular work.
- He highlights the development of DEC Notes and DEC Forms, which were significant products for the company.

Work Environment and Company Culture

- Thomas describes the work environment at DEC as collegial and supportive, with opportunities for informal interaction and idea sharing.
- He mentions the practice of "Woods meetings," where small groups would go off-site for team-building and strategy discussions.
- Thomas discusses the differences between DEC UK and DEC US, noting a more open and innovative culture in the US.

- He reflects on the changes in company culture over time, including the impact of growth and the shift towards more traditional sales and marketing practices.

Personal Experiences and Career Development

- Thomas shares personal experiences of relocating to the US and the challenges of adjusting to a new environment.
- He describes the support DEC provided for relocating employees, including home visits and assistance with buying property.
- Thomas discusses his involvement in the Vagon News, an internal email newsletter that kept employees connected across different locations.
- He reflects on the impact of DEC's acquisition by Compaq and HP, expressing sadness at the loss of the company's innovative culture and products.

Legacy and Personal Impact

- Thomas believes DEC's legacy is hidden because many of its innovations have been adopted by other companies.
- He highlights the importance of networking and electronic communication, which DEC pioneered in the 1980s.
- Thomas reflects on his personal growth and development during his time at DEC, noting the skills and experiences he gained.
- He concludes by emphasizing the importance of continuous integration and collaboration in software development, which he believes was a key part of DEC's culture.