



Is Work Study Dead?

In the 1970's every manufacturing company employed a work study engineer. Local authorities and government departments were also awash with management services officers, the public sector equivalent of work study engineers. Despite a number of name changes the role of work study has virtually disappeared from the UK, culminating in its professional institute admitting its membership was in terminal decline.

It is easy to see why this decline has happened. At its height of popularity incentive schemes based upon work measurement were commonplace, in fact, for many people bonus earnings were a significant element of their wages. Now these types of incentive schemes are rarer than hen's teeth.

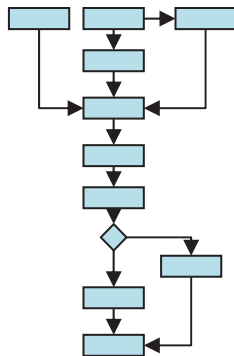
The continual decline in UK manufacturing has also had its toll on the reduction in work study numbers, with what's left of this sector being relatively lean, and not the place where significant improvements in productivity can be made. And anyway there is an easier way of reducing labour costs, with all points east being the preferred solution for many companies.



If there appears to be little need for dedicated work study professionals does this mean that the techniques are no longer required?

The answer has to be that the techniques are still valid. Productivity is still a major issue and the UK performance is reputedly well below many of our European competitors. Work measurement and method study, the essential elements of the work study engineer, are as valid today as they have ever been. Some industries, notably food retailing, has recognised that considerable improvements can be made by measuring and analysing work. But the big difference between the traditional approach used by the work study engineers and the new use of the techniques is the way in which the techniques are used. Rather than conduct work study exercises in infinite detail, which was sometimes necessary for incentive purposes, the new approach involves a more pragmatic use of the appropriate techniques.

process improvement



work study techniques

- ← Flowcharting
- ← Time study/activity sampling
- ← Method study
- ← Workflow analysis/line balancing
- ← Ergonomics
- ← Value added analysis

Learning to use these techniques maximises the effectiveness of improvement activity. In the absence of dedicated professional work study engineers is up to team leaders, supervisors and managers to become familiar with the choice and application of techniques. Just another task for already overloaded management but definitely useful skills which can be passed on to others in the organisation.

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