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Cover story: Outer Space
Cover image: Gracie H Broom

comment

On p76 of this edition I talk to Purna Sen, who appeared in a BBC documentary featuring whistle-blowers. She discusses the sexual harassment of people working at the United Nations, and examples of sexual exploitation and other abuse of those who its agencies are tasked to help. At the core of such abuses lie strict hierarchies and power that cannot be challenged, as well as the malignant construct that the mistreated person is often somehow at fault.

On page 14, I speak to Lucy Easthope; one of the areas she talks about is the very real risk of responders causing further distress to those affected by a disaster, often through poorly thought out policies that fail to centre humans at the heart of planning. Easthope also highlights hierarchies and the difficulty of challenging power.

One example of unintended consequences in technology arises on p48, where our authors warn that the 2G/3G switch off could leave Europeans travelling to the USA unable to call 911 emergency services through their cell roaming provider.

On p24 I speak to Wake Smith about the range of possible, and rather concerning, technologies that could help mitigate the effects of climate warming on our planet. Smith is calling urgently for more research to avoid any unintended consequences of deploying potentially life-changing technology on a global scale – the 'least bad' options – without understanding what could go wrong.

Elsewhere (p80), authors outline our vulnerabilities to what is happening in outer space, warning of the consequences that space debris and shifting political alliances could have down here on Earth. Here, at least, governance consensus might be forming.

It is impossible to sum up the burning indignation that the CRJ team felt when reading some articles for the first time. Among those outlining violence against women in conflict or after disasters, abuse of power and exploitation, or the self interest and slow action surrounding global climate governance, there are many articles that offer hope. But they are in danger of being overwhelmed by those that highlight human malice, ineptitude or plain indifference.



Re-imagining safety at crowded venues

Christopher Kemp describes how a crisis can create the opportunity to rethink safety and security, using the UK's Wembley Stadium Olympic Steps project as an example

Perhaps the most significant risk to any building project is the creation of an innovative design whose benefits may not initially be recognised by the wider stakeholder team because the finer details are in flux until the project is completed. This means a leap of faith and belief that the original vision will stand the test of time from inception to realisation. This article provides an insight into a project that took nearly five years to deliver – the iconic steps that now provide the gateway to Wembley Stadium in Brent, London.

The risks in removing a tried and tested pedway (ramp) system that transported the crowd to the turnstiles for decades would be difficult at any time. Replacing the pedway with a set of steps appeared to some – initially – a less safe alternative. Much deliberation ensued, as is usual when visionary or innovative design is involved. But it was the developing stakeholder team's trust in the vision that pushed the replacement structure forwards. The team achieved this by creating an integrated framework that not only provided a safer substitution for the original pedway, but one that was aesthetically stunning, ergonomically deliberate and accompanied by a unique safety operating system that combined an integrated human, technological and mechanical methodology.

Taking into consideration compliance, safety concerns, a pandemic, structural integrity and the need to test in a small time window, this project provided stakeholders with a series of difficult and often problematic risks. The physical design of the steps was important; with the pedway removed there was no going back, thus a forensic understanding of how the steps worked and their design was paramount to ensuring that risk mitigation strategies evolved continually as the process moved forward.

The developer had to mitigate a series of risks in the construction phase, many of them associated with finishing the project on time. Having to put the steps in place and make sure that they were ready for the Euro 2020 was a big challenge and, when Covid struck, it created the added difficulty of making time during the pandemic to work the steps into a truncated programme. The project came in

on time through luck and good judgement. Snow forecast in January did not materialise, so the work did not pause. Construction inflation could have increased the costs, but careful planning and management meant that expenditure remained relatively stable throughout the process.

Buy-in from stakeholders was crucial. There was a certain amount of pushback in regard to accessibility, as people with disabilities had complained about poor access to the stadium for many years. The Wembley team worked closely with the developer and other stakeholders to source innovative new ways of creating accessibility. The pedway had not met *Disability Discrimination Act* compliance so, to mitigate the risks, a level access for wheelchairs from the Blue Car Park was incorporated. The original lifts were poor and the customer journey unpleasant, so teams reviewed the design of high-speed lifts at Heathrow Airport and, rather than place lifts inside the stadium, located them outdoors to allow immediate wheelchair access.

The outcome appeased those who were slightly nervous, thanks to a physical and human resource being securely in place to avoid slip, trip and fall hazards, as well as crowd collapse and crushing issues. The new system's ability to enable quick response to any problems was gradually welcomed by the stakeholder team. Since the opening of the steps, there has only been one incident related to slips, trips and falls and this was caused by a person fainting.

Gentler incline

The absence of incidents on the steps has been thanks to the landing ramp and step depth, which involved further innovations. A gentler incline meant the loss of another landing, making both the ascent and descent safer. Keen to incorporate as many safety factors as possible, the developer acknowledged the importance of lighting, wayfinding and signage. Lights placed under the handrails to light the ground were based on a principle from the aircraft industry; the LEDs use secondary power if power fails.

The steps' operating plan initially had a small number of safety concerns centring around the use of an untried and untested environment. However, by breaking it down into an operations plan to help with the mitigation of slips, trips and falls on the steps, head of steps, approaches to the steps and the stairs, it was actually quite simple. The task was to create a

The risks throughout this project were ever present and constantly changing

author image

holistic plan to be implemented by the Wembley team.

If the developer had been unable to deliver the steps, the key risk consequences centred around whether events could still be held in the stadium. Once work had been carried out to prove that events could still take place without the steps or ramps, the risk was somewhat mitigated, enabling the operating plan to be developed. A risk perspective across the whole process was also important and, because of the number of stakeholders, the third-party objective view was important to frame the steps from a wider viewpoint. This was because relative risk, comparing the proposal with the existing ramps for example, was also an important factor.

The stadium faced perennial challenges with wayfinding and signage in that the complexity of the existing signage was not particularly user friendly. Instead of fixating on 90,000 people coming up the steps and using the 32-metres of operating space to filter into the ground, it was proposed that only 50 per cent of customers would use the steps

to reach their seating. Perimeter ways to the east and west directed the other half to their seats, improving safety and providing a better customer experience. The spare capacity on the steps created a better arrival experience for everyone.

The stadium was always supposed to be managed on a colour quadrant basis. It is not about the gate number, it is about the choice of colour, and this helps to divide the crowd, taking layers like an onion to direct customers to their seats. The Wembley name is not needed on the signs, because the crowd can see the stadium throughout the whole delivery process. The system starts with a colour and gradually reduces to gate letters, followed by row and then seat numbers the closer the attendee gets to their destination. The simplicity of the security management practice identifies the quadrants first and then, by working through the customer service process, mitigates a build-up of customers from Wembley Park Station to the stadium should an issue occur.

Most of what has been addressed in this article so far concerns physical resource, but human resources are just as important. The physical resource comprises stop and go lights, overhead programmable message boards and a public address system that supports messaging verbally (both pre-recorded and live). This all links directly to the control room, creating immediate communication to the spectators. The human resource to support this was vital.

One of the biggest risks was staffing and familiarising the team with the steps' operating plan. The pandemic put parameters around what the team could really do. It had to focus on training the most consistent staff; this included those working the quadrants at a supervisory and managerial level. These people could then brief new sets of stewards if needed, translating the plan through briefing cascades.

Covid-19 decimated the number of companies available to work on the plan. Some had to restart their databases from scratch, and it is estimated that upwards of 250,000 people have been lost from the industry during the pandemic.

Although the pandemic caused many challenges for the stadium and created new and more convoluted and elaborate risks, it has also had a positive effect. Initially,

the test phase for the steps would have been carried out with 90,000 people attending an event. It would have been a high risk to test on the day of a final at full capacity, with two sets of fans attending. Being able to create a test protocol at smaller capacity events, because of Covid restrictions, provided practice time by default.

First, a training day for safety managers, supervisors and stewards was held to bed staff in. Following this, an event with 4,000 key workers introduced the steps, and a further football event, the Carabao Cup Final with 8,000 fans from Tottenham Hotspur and Manchester City, left one final event before the Euros and the FA Cup Final with 20,000 fans attending, to test the stadium protocols and practices further. The build time and the timing of the original test event would have meant stress and risk for the team. However, this type of human resource phasing was a lesson learnt.

Ongoing training and retention of key staff will be critical; without these, the team will be constantly starting from scratch. The risk is remuneration at a level that will keep staff on the job for the company. The security industry really needs a strong career pathway to enable staff to be proud of the vital work that they do. To be clear, service is as important as security and safety.

The Euros was an important test, and it was clear to see that unless you test a stadium under the most severe of circumstances, there will be no learning points identified to fold into future events. One element that fails to meet the eye is that the implementation of safety systems and structures is often put into practice to prevent challenges rather than dealing with them reactively. The learning from this centres around dealing with anarchy, a non-football audience and the power of a high profile game straight after the lifting of a lockdown. These were all elements that could have created the perfect storm and the team on duty was able to mitigate further challenges and any loss of life by constantly reforming, managing and changing its perspective.

The final test was the England Albania Game, which showed a few small glitches but also provided evidence about how successfully the Wembley team had implemented its learning development from previous games.

Interoperability

The risks throughout this project were ever present and constantly changing in terms of finance, human resources, customer orientation, design delivery and health and safety. The key elements of designing a new way to load customers into the stadium, designing support mechanisms for the physical resources and strong communication structures, can show venues across the world not only that a strong group of stakeholders can achieve remarkable things, but also that interoperability and a willingness to work together to solve the most difficult problems pay dividends. The constant process of providing security, safety and service is vital.

The development is not over, continuous management, monitoring, reflecting and feeding back into cascades to educate others, all form part of the plan.

This project embodies state-of-the-art steps that create an iconic gate to the stadium.

Author



Professor CHRISTOPHER KEMP, CEO of Mind Over Matter Consultancy Ltd (MOM), is experienced in the fields of event safety, crowd safety, emergency planning, crowd science and leadership and risk management

Much of this planning concerns physical resource, but human resources are just as important

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