

Institute of Management Services

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President's Update

Prof Colin Coulson-Thomas

The global picture remains grim. Our involvement and services are badly needed. Collective human activities continue to degrade the environment, damage ecosystems, reduce biodiversity, run down natural capital, and generate a variety of negative externalities. These include contributing to global warming and climate change.

As a consequence, we face a number of inter-related global risks and existential threats. Our current lifestyles and business activities are unsustainable. The scientific consensus of authoritative (IPCC, UNEP, WMO and UNFCCC) synthesis, summary and stocktake reports is that our collective responses are inadequate and generally too little, too late.

The shared risks and existential threats we face create a common interest in survival. Yet when collective responses are most needed, the world has fractured into groupings with different perspectives and priorities. Requirements to relocate and replace infrastructures as areas are inundated or become uninhabitable are also being overlooked.

Many people seem to be shifting their attention and time from the natural world to virtual worlds and social media. Growing reliance upon digital technologies and the internet is increasing vulnerability to cyber and other risks and reducing our collective resilience. They may not always be available, whether due to mineral shortages, cable cutting or solar flares.

At any moment we could also trigger a tipping point after which global warming becomes unstoppable, yet many people, companies and Governments want more. As extreme weather events multiply, they advocate growth and pursue unsustainable development models. To produce more with less there is increasing demand for productivity and efficiency.

Delaying collective and entrepreneurial climate action risks conflicts, mass migrations, and breakdowns of law and order. As well as these challenges, there are related opportunities to transition, transform, reimagine, and innovate. Possibilities abound for more sustainable communities and societies, and simpler, healthier, less stressful and more fulfilling lifestyles.

We can choose. Digital technologies could be used to enrich, empower and develop the skills of employees and widen their horizons, rather than to automate, control and replace them.

There are emissions to measure; impacts, activities, operations, actions and proposals to analyse and assess; and opportunities to evaluate. We need to do things differently. The skills of our members are also relevant for transition to activities, operations, lifestyles and infrastructures that are more efficient, resilient, responsible and inclusive.

The management services profession has a crucial role to play, especially in enhancing productivity and performance in areas such as decarbonisation, protecting and re-generating

eco-systems and reducing pollution, waste and other negative externalities. Economical and efficient use of scarce resources is now a critical priority.

Our most pressing global challenges and threats over the next ten years present worldwide opportunities for management services professionals. Whether climate change mitigation and adaptation, creating more resilient communities and infrastructures, or enabling relocation from areas no longer habitable or soon to be inundated, there are copious possibilities.

My ambassadorial activities to encourage and influence responses to contemporary challenges and opportunities include writing articles and theme papers for conferences, conventions and congresses for business leaders and speaking at external events. Whenever appropriate and possible I mention my IMS role to increase awareness of our institute.

Over 80 items were published during the year, including four peer review quarterly journal articles, three learned journal articles, five theme papers for international conferences, and five quarterly and twelve monthly professional journal articles. When writing for the institute's own journal, I try to complement other contributions.

My theme papers were also published in seven conference souvenir books and a chapter I contributed on responsible leadership and good governance was published in a UN/IRL supported book on responsible leadership. Sixteen of my articles and four speeches were published on-line. Sixteen articles were linked to e-newsletters and eleven appeared in a blog.

My speaking activities included contributions to five international conferences, including keynotes and chairing a plenary session at a global convention. I also provided a keynote at an international webinar and plenary speeches at three global webinars. Overseas national event contributions included a Foundation Day Lecture and a Special Address.

Other activities included delivering an on-line masterclass, participation in an international consultative forum, speaking at the launch of the UN/IRL supported book on responsible leadership and service on four editorial boards. Involvement in agenda setting and providing Theme Papers requested by VIPs helps to influence thinking at international events.

Influence and action are needed. Unless dramatic steps are taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other externalities, our current operations, activities and lifestyles are under threat. If we do not step up our efforts to explore, create and adopt less damaging substitutes and more beneficial alternatives the sunlit uplands of a better future will allude us.

There are myriad opportunities for IMS members of all ages and levels of knowledge, skill and professional experience to engage and become involved. Our focus on evidence, analysis, effectiveness and efficiency, and our experience of confronting reality and making the most of what we have, could benefit a range of initiatives, projects and collaborations.

Our institute emerged in response to existential threats and skill and resource limitations. Today we are as relevant as ever. It is vital that the Institute of Management Services and its activities continue to operate. We owe a debt of gratitude to those delivering reports today, and to all those who assume institute responsibilities and contribute to our work.