

I Am a Volunteer and I Do...

John Lomax



What activities have you undertaken as part of your volunteering

I've been a volunteer for about 7 years now, across three disparate activities.

I was selected to become an INCOSE Certification Application Reviewer (CAR) by INCOSE central in 2011 and then separately and in parallel for the UK CSEP Certification Programme in 2014. This requires me to individually assess the Applicant's documented experience and coordinate with a small team to ensure the Applicant has met the minimum criteria for Certified Systems Engineering Professional (CSEP). The Team Leader, together with the other two Reviewers, document their assessments and report their approvals to the INCOSE Professional Development Team for their final decision.

Based on my personal observations and involvement in the SESAR Programme, in 2014 I gave a presentation to the INCOSE UK Enterprise Systems Engineering Interest Group - 'The SESAR Enterprise (An overview and observations of SESAR in the context of Enterprise Systems Engineering and Systems of Systems Engineering)' at Shrivenham. This was mainly driven by interests in high-lighting the emergence of the need for Enterprise Systems Engineering capabilities and skills, which I believe we will need in the future.

Though I had a minor role, I also volunteered to involve myself in the INCOSE Academic Group (Schools Thread); and this was driven by a motivation to 'feedback into the system'.

What Originally inspired you to volunteer for INCOSE UK?

For my INCOSE Certification activities, I was selected/requested rather than directly inspired; however that said, 80+ Application Reviews later, it has demonstrated to me, the broad spectrum of the Systems Engineering domain that we occupy and this then further inspired me to involve myself in the other activities mentioned here.

With my working experience, combined with my personal interest of Large Scale Integrated Systems and Enterprise Systems Engineering, this inspired me to contact the Leader of the INCOSE UK Enterprise Systems Engineering Interest Group and offer my time to provide a presentation/workshop. After some coordination and a great deal of preparation, I presented my personal observations of the SESAR Programme. This programme is truly an Enterprise! And so to this end I delivered a 2-hour overview with video/audio animations, wall charts and hand-outs.

When I look back at my Education and work experience, I realised that the first time I came across the words 'Architecture', 'Requirements' and 'Life-cycle' was many years after university! This realisation combined with the launch of the INCOSE Academic Group, motivated me to volunteer for the School's thread. Though I had a minor role, I was eager to suggest that if we managed to introduce these words into the school curriculum (via such mechanisms as STEM net, for example) then that would be a big win!

What do you feel you get out of your volunteering?

Volunteering is altruistic in nature - however there is definitely a positive feedback for all involved, in these activities that I have undertaken, I believe.

Systems Engineering is such a large and diverse body of knowledge that if you were to stay within your 'working comfort zone' only, through-out your working career/environment, then you would only get to scratch the surface of the subject! By volunteering, you get to really network and cooperate with people from diverse backgrounds and experience.

This in my opinion, provided some unexpected benefits, by giving me view-points on topics that I would not normally be able to get from within an organisation/project environment only. These view-points, influences and experience of others, allowed me to make mental leaps/relationships between domains that, at first glimpse, did not appear to be related and this had a positive feedback into my personal interest in Large Scale Integrated Systems and Enterprise Systems Engineering.

And for good measure these efforts can be recognised - In 2015, I was awarded an INCOSE Outstanding Service Award, for my activities related to the UK CSEP Review process.

Do you have any advice or feedback to offer anyone who is considering volunteering?

I think that if you have a personal interest generally in Systems Engineering or if there is a specific topic, within the Systems Engineering body of knowledge, then these types of activities can a motivator for you!

By volunteering, you push yourself into an non-company environment where hierarchy or governance does not necessarily exist, but there is a large degree of self-rule, self-organisation, self-reliance, self-determinacy and this promotes innovative ideas and thinking.

Volunteering may allow you to practice skills and competencies that you can't achieve in your restricted company/project environment. Some volunteering activities will allow you to negotiate, co-operate and be an effective team member or leader, while others will require you to work alone.

So my advice is that there are plenty of activities for every type of Systems Engineer and personality and you can find activities and roles that will suit you, and help with your personal development.

First published in Preview, Spring 2017