

# I Am a Volunteer and I Do...

## James Towers



### What activities have you undertaken as part of your volunteering

As chair of the Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSE) working and interest groups I'm involved in driving their objectives, facilitating the workstreams, organising and running meetings and communicating with members and the wider community. Originally our focus was just on being a working group, but a couple of years ago it became apparent that a large number of members are 'interested' in MBSE without necessarily wanting to be involved in any of our workstreams. At this point we took the decision to spin-off an interest group and appointed two co-chairs, one to look after the workstreams and one to look after the newly formed interest group. My original plan was to be less involved in the interest group and focus more on the workstreams, but as I'm sure the interest group co-chair Ian Clark (MBDA) will confirm, I don't always find it easy to let go!

In terms of our workstreams, I was lead author on the second version of Z9 – "What is Model-Based Systems Engineering?", workstream lead for our 2013 MBSE survey, the results of which I presented at ASEC, and I am currently the lead for the "MBSE & BIM" and "MBSE Value" workstreams.

As part of our objectives to promote MBSE and inform the wider community, I've also given presentations to other INCOSE UK groups and its members organisations. Often in the past, as a thank you for hosting our meetings, I've delivered lunch-and-learn sessions to our hosts which has been a great way to generate interest in the group and INCOSE UK in general.

### What Originally inspired you to volunteer for INCOSE UK?

A mix of things, as a consultant my business relies on an unashamed willingness to do self-promotion, so this was a big driver.

Opportunity was also important. I first became involved back in 2012 when I realised there wasn't a dedicated forum for MBSE at INCOSE UK. I approached the then Technical Director, Andrew Farncombe, about forming a working group and he said, "go for it!". INCOSE UK has and continues to mature quite rapidly since then, but at the time the only guidance was a brief document on how to run a local group. It was a bit like having a blank map and being told to fill it in as you go along!

I believe that if you want something to change then you have to take responsibility for making it happen, and one of the great things about INCOSE UK is that it has a lot of credibility while being small enough that individual members, if willing to volunteer, can have a big impact.

In the early days of the WG I wasn't sure if there was enough interest. For our first meeting we had 7 people, but for our second we only had 3 people and one of those has never been back!

I wasn't Chartered when I originally formed the MBSE working group and being involved in that certainly helped me meet some of the objectives as I worked towards the competencies defined in the UK-SPEC.

Mostly I thought it would be enjoyable and on the whole it has been.

## What do you feel you get out of your volunteering?

I'm constantly learning from the MBSE groups, either from materials presented by the members or research I have carried out as part of the workstreams. Presenting to other groups and organisations has made me focus my own understanding of the subject and there are always new questions to make me think. Undoubtable the biggest development area has been in my organisational and soft skills. I still can't herd cats, but these days I try less often. Another benefit of being involved is that I've visited lots of places and organisations that perhaps I wouldn't have otherwise had access to. As an example, during our last meeting, held at Rolls-Royce in Derby we were treated to a guided tour of the museum. Not bad for a working day!

I've also met many systems engineers and other useful contacts, some of which have become friends.

If all that wasn't enough it also provides a valuable contribution to my continuing professional development record.

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

I'd pass on what Andrew Farncombe said to me – "Go for it!". There have been lots of people who have volunteered to get involved with the MBSE groups over the past few years, with various degrees of success. Often people would like to be involved, but when it comes down to it, they just don't have as much time as they would like. That's fine, we all have busy lives and there are more important things we all need to do. So, if you are interest in volunteering with INCOSE UK, I would say the most important thing is to be realistic about how much time you can commit. The next important quality is to take ownership. It's not uncommon for new volunteers in the MBSE WG to ask, "what do INCOSE UK want us to do?".

Obviously, there are lots of different INCOSE UK stakeholders, the Council, the UKAB, the Secretariat, the groups and the wider membership. The response therefore is usually "We don't know, you'd better ask them". The most successful volunteers are therefore people who are self-starters who can propose their own objectives, agree them with the stakeholders and then pursue them. We have a rule in the MBSE interest group – "We will support any (suitable) MBSE related workstream you propose, provided you agree to lead it". Experience has shown us that we are overflowing with people with ideas, not so much with people who can get stuff done.

First published in Preview, Winter 2019