



Manchester based  
Director who  
provides project  
planning and delay  
analysis services

## Day in the life of Phil Durrant, Planning Director for UK and Europe

### What is your position/role at Systech?

I am Planning Director for Systech's UK and European operations. I am responsible for our planning service which includes project support during all phases of the project lifecycle and time related dispute resolution. Our team of planners has a broad skill set to be able to support our client's requirements.

### What is your typical day?

I don't have a typical day! I am predominantly project based so each day is dependent on the type of commission I am engaged on. Project support roles are normally based in the contractor's site offices whereas claims related roles can be based in contractor's offices or be run from one of Systech's offices. I am currently engaged on two claims related commissions, one in the energy market and one in the oil and gas market.

### What are the interesting aspects of your role?

On project support commissions it is being able to integrate into the project teams and contribute to the delivery of the project. On claims related commissions it is the identification of the key issues of the dispute and being able to contribute to developing the strategy to prepare a realistic recovery document for our client. The dynamics within the contractor's teams and how they interact and their relationships with professional teams can be fascinating.

### What are the challenges?

The main challenges are getting up to speed as quickly as possible whilst gaining an understanding of the project's requirements and current position. When we have been appointed because something has gone wrong or the project is under financial or time pressure it can be a challenge gaining the trust of the project team. It can also take some time to convince some contactors of the importance of having a realistic robust programme to aid project delivery. Accurate reporting and reacting to what the programme is telling you is key to successful project delivery. On claims related commissions the biggest challenge can be managing the client's expectations, based on their actual position.

### What training and support has Systech given you?

I have attended and presented internal and external seminars and taken part in Systech's management training programme. Systech has also supported me in my professional development in gaining membership of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators.

### What words of advice would you offer someone thinking of joining Systech?

Have an open mind. We operate in a wide range of markets and sometimes you may be outside of your comfort zone grappling with strange terminology and/or different approaches. This diversity is one of the main attractions; each commission is different in terms of location, duration and challenges. My own personal experience has covered construction, transport, energy, oil and gas, telecommunications and nuclear. Locations have been primarily in the UK but include some commissions in France. Durations have ranged from 4 weeks to 4 years. The company management structure is very flat and it is up to the individual as to how they develop and progress within the business.

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### **What social activities have you been involved in?**

Systech organise social events at regular intervals throughout the year when you can catch up with colleagues and discuss the relative merits and challenges of your particular commission. In addition, I have been on a number of client organised events when part of their project teams. We are also not averse to having an impromptu drink or two after office hours where we can put the world to rights.

### **What is the culture like?**

There is a very open culture with a refreshing lack of internal politics that normally exists within a large organisation. The 'management team' are accessible and approachable. There is a wide range of knowledge and experience available to provide support for whatever challenge you may face on your particular commission.

### **How has your career developed with Systech?**

I started as a Senior Planner based in London working predominantly in project support roles. I progressed to Associate Director and began to take responsibility for the planning team in the UK. I am now Planning Director and my role includes business development and leading commissions.

### **How has Systech helped you achieve your career goals?**

I was a Senior Planner within a main contractor environment before joining Systech. My career development was dependent on waiting for others to move or moving from contractor to contractor. Systech has given me the opportunity to work in a wide range of markets and a wide variety and scale of projects ranging from £4m to £800m which has given me a much broader exposure than would have been possible had I stayed within the main contractor environment. They have been supportive in my desire to progress and I now hold a senior position within the business.

### **What makes Systech different from the competition?**

Systech is unique in terms of its size, its focus on supporting main contractors, its breadth in terms of countries it operates in and the range of services it provides. In addition to the commercial and planning/project management services Systech's services includes Systech Solicitors, visualisations, augmented reality and the site diary app intended to assist contractors in maintain adequate progress records.

### **What has been your greatest achievement with Systech?**

It is difficult to identify the greatest achievement as success can be measured in a number of ways depending on the particulars of the commission. However highlights include being involved on a project with a subcontractor where they were facing a loss of millions of pounds and turning it around to making a profit; being involved with a project that was terminated for convenience with the client's position being that the final account was worth £250k and settling at £12m and working on a project for a French contractor working for a German manufacturer where the contract language was English, the contract la was German and the seat of arbitration was Paris. The project was running up to 2 years late and we successful negotiated an extension of time and an increase in the contract sum.

### **Tell us about a project where you have learnt a key lesson?**

You never stop learning! From a time perspective it is relatively simple: you need to understand the contract requirements and ensure that your programme includes all key milestones and interfaces; you need a robust logically linked programme that takes account of the specific project constraints; you must ensure design, procurement and construction activities are logically linked in the same programme; you need accurate progress reporting in order to understand your current position and identify reasons for any delay; you need to comply with the notice provisions in the contract and you must keep records. Simple really!

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