Towards ‘Basic Ergonomics’ – Competence?

Neil Thomas
Suncrest Ergonomics
Cardiff, Wales, UK

Abstract

Six years after the ‘new UK Ergonomics Certificate’ was presented to the Europe Chapter at Dortmund, we have entered the 21st century. Now we need to measure and direct growth in basic ergonomics. Since 1996 the UK national qualification called ‘Basic Ergonomics’ has grown steadily. Now over 200 participants have attended more than 20 courses based in England, Scotland and Wales. Other Europeans have also attended this one week course. Almost 90% have passed and 20% have achieved a credit rating in Basic Ergonomics. European and national laws require relevant competent persons at places of work. This presentation will consider how and where ‘Basic Ergonomics’ has grown; whether the results are worthwhile and how this form of ‘system training’ should improve. Can it progress into competence?

Ethos of Ergonomics

Ergonomics should be ergonomic. It should be readily understood, available and applied by the population at large, especially within their places of work. Some people, including ergonomists, argue that it is not difficult to fit jobs to workers, nor to fit products to users - a double aim of ergonomics. However in attempting to achieve these matching fits, we discover that the necessary criteria can often be incompatible. A product, for example, may be easy to use but possibly unsafe. The criteria which are used to decide if there is a good fit between work and workers include:

- effectiveness
- ease of use
- comfort
- health and safety
- quality of life

Pheasant (1997), in his excellent final work Bodyspace, argues that the deeper we fish in these waters the more difficult the problem becomes. He summarises the ergonomic approach to design as the principle of user-centred design.