

PLM J Product Lifecycle Management Journal

*The Journal of the PLM Interest Group.
Circulated to members and subscribers each calendar month.*

WHAT'S NEW IN JANUARY

On January 1 there was a birthday and the Product Lifecycle Management Interest Group is now one year old.

The PLMIG is well established in the PLM arena and aims to continue the same rate of development in 2005.

There is so much 'behind the scenes' activity this month that this issue of the *PLM Journal* is shorter than usual. Preparations don't give much to report, but events at the beginning of February will provide a lot more material for next month's issue.

Both of our current initiatives, 'PLM Research 2005' and 'PLM Best Practice 2005' have launch events as early in the year as possible.

This is because, as always, they have deliverables and follow-on activities. The earlier we hold the events, the more time there is to build on the results.

PLM Research 2005

This 2-day launch meeting in Brussels is the most rapid event the PLMIG has ever organised. The possibility of holding a meeting was first raised in the week before Christmas, and the meeting date had to be before the Best Practice event in the first full week of February.

This gave just 6 weeks from idea to event, and (because of the New Year break) allowed only 4 weeks for people to respond from the first mailshot onwards.

Despite this, the event has seized the imagination of the academic and research community, and there will be a 'full house' at the SwissCore buildings in Brussels.

This is significant because it means the RSIG now has a critical mass, and can begin to work as an active entity in its own right.

PLM Best Practice

The PLMIG web site challenges the reader: "Some people doubt that Best Practice exists, some believe they know what it is, and everyone would like to achieve it."

Registration is showing that the web site is right. Many people are unsure about how to respond to PLM Best Practice, and there are more requests for additional or repeat information than usual. The event on 09 February should generate some new and interesting insights.

Awareness and Definition

In this month's issue we also have more thoughts on these two long-standing issues.

In the PLM J this Month:

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2. **PLM Research 2005**
3. **PLM Awareness**
4. **PLM Definition**

PLM Research 2005

18 delegates are expected at the PLM Research 2005 Meeting, many of whom will have joined the PLMIG to attend. What's happening?

Fast Start-Up

The PLM Research Meeting to be held in Brussels, Belgium on February 2-3, 2005, provides a good example of the speed with which the PLMIG can act.

It was only at the end of December 2004 that John Stark was informed by a PLMIG member of the announcement of several recent EC FP6 Calls for Proposals on the CORDIS web-site. Some of these appeared to be related to PLM.

As one of these had a Closing Date of February 10, 2005, there was a need for immediate action, and a meeting seemed necessary. However, there were quite a lot of unknowns:-

- which Calls for Proposals could be of interest to the PLMIG?
- where could a meeting be arranged in such a short time?
- would people be able to get to a meeting at short notice?
- how could the EC be involved?

Calls for Proposals

The starting point for the meeting was one particular Call, but as time went by, it soon became apparent that there were many Calls of potential interest. This was somewhat of a surprise as, in the early days of FP6, there were very few Calls of interest to PLM. Eventually, 11 potential Calls of interest were identified.

To keep everyone informed of the Calls as they were identified, they were listed on the PLMIG web-site (<http://www.plmig.com>). A link on the front page already existed to "Activities in 2005" and, from that page, a link was made to a newly created "PLM Research 2005" page.

An additional subject of interest arose with the announcement of the EC's Manufature Vision for 2020 document. This is seen as an important input for Calls to the next Framework Programme (FP7). However it does not mention PLM. Yet if PLM Calls are to appear in FP7 (which will probably start in 2007), PLM needs to be very visible to the EC during the FP7 preparation years (2004-2006).

The Meeting Date

In view of the Call Closing Date of February 10, 2005, there were not a lot of potential dates for the Meeting, especially if the Meeting was going to lead to the preparation of a proposal. In view of the number of Calls to discuss, it was felt that a 2 day meeting would be necessary, and that Wednesday February 2 and Thursday February 3 were the most suitable dates.

The Meeting Location

A few years ago, the ICP-35K Consortium, one of the predecessors of the PLMIG, had identified Brussels as a good place to have a meeting about PLM research. At the time, due to lack of finance, the meeting had not been held. However, the idea for a Brussels meeting was not lost, and when mentioned to another PLMIG member, led to a suggestion for a meeting location near to the EC's R&D Directorate building.

Inviting Interested Parties

A few lines about the planned PLM Research 2005 meeting appeared in the January 3, 2005 issue of 2PLM, and this was followed by e-mails to people on the PLMIG's mailing lists.

FAQs

When people became aware of the event, there was little information available about the event, with the result that they had many questions. To avoid answering the same question several times, a FAQ page was added to the web-site, and people were referred to it for answers to their questions.

EC Input

In view of previous experience with FP6 proposals it was felt that it would be very important to get some input from EC Project Officers about the open Calls. It was felt that clarification from EC Project Officers about Manufature was also necessary. As a result, John Stark visited the EC in mid-January and will take the results of his discussions into the meeting.

Results of the Meeting

Details of the meeting will be provided in the February 2005 issue of the *PLM Journal*.

PLM Awareness

John Stark sets the scene for a subject that is more complex than it first appears.

The subject of PLM Awareness is raised regularly in PLMIG meetings and, since all members are interested in increasing PLM awareness, looks like a good subject for a PLMIG activity.

Target Audience

At first glance, it may look as if the main target audience, for which awareness should be raised, is in manufacturing companies that could use PLM, but on closer examination it will be seen that PLM awareness is missing in many other organisations.

Among application vendors, there are still many vendors which have not taken PLM on-board, but continue to target traditional markets, such as CAD and PDM, that they addressed 5 or 10 years ago. Application vendors, as a group, are usually among the first to follow market trends, and the lack of awareness of some is worrying

Among user companies, there is still a lack of awareness in large corporations, and in SMEs the situation is even worse. Often, user companies are introduced to new technologies by the vendors of their existing applications. As some of these are currently not fully aware of PLM, or are mainly interested in protecting the sales of their existing products, the take-up by user companies is not being driven as fast as possible.

Many academic organisations have not yet worked out how to address PLM. The collaborative and global implications of PLM make it difficult for such organisations, used to working alone, to know how to respond to it. Many of these organisations work closely with industrial companies, and the limited awareness in user companies diminishes the motivation and driving force for academics

Venture capitalists and other potential sources of investment/funding are faced with a wide range of new opportunities to invest in. Often they rely on advice from industrialists and academics. If there is a lack of awareness of PLM in the overall environment, they may not be as motivated as expected to fund new ventures and projects in the area of PLM.

The Problem

There is the danger that a continued lack of PLM awareness will create a vicious circle in which the hoped-for self-fulfilling and self-fuelling upward spiral never occurs, and a negative downward spiral takes its place leading to a gradual loss of everybody's interest. Such a loss of interest would be of benefit to few.

Benefits

For established vendors of PLM applications, it is clear that an increase in PLM awareness should lead to an increase in their sales. A loss of interest in PLM could well spill over into related applications, and lead to a drop in overall revenues.

For start-up vendors of PLM applications, an increase in PLM awareness is even more important. They have limited funding, and unless companies start to buy their products soon, they are likely to run out of funding and be unable to raise more investment.

Academics who commit to PLM need the subject to increase in importance so that they will be rated higher by their evaluating bodies. Teaching in an area that is of interest to nobody is unlikely to provide them a secure future. Similarly, carrying out research in an area of little importance is unlikely to be profitable to them in the long run.

Addressing the Problem

Perhaps one reason for the lack of movement is that it is not obvious how PLM Awareness would be improved. Various suggestions have been made, such as:-

- Seminars
- Breakfast meetings
- An annual Conference
- A webinar
- A roadshow

and others will be brainstormed in the coming weeks. The PLMIG is a member-driven organisation and your feedback on this subject, such as possible ways to improve PLM Awareness, will be appreciated, at plmawareness@plmig.com.

PLM Definition

More thoughts on this long-standing subject

Background

During the PLMIG Corporate Members' Meetings last year, the subject of PLM Definition was once again raised as a potential activity for the PLMIG.

For the moment however, it was decided to put the subject on the back burner until it becomes clearer how the PLM Awareness activity progresses. It may be something the PLMIG will look at under the PLM Awareness heading. Alternatively, of course, it may be that as the PLMIG makes progress with PLM Awareness, it will be found that PLM Definition is not part of that activity.

Theoretical Definition

In some ways, it is surprising that the subject of PLM Definition is raised so often. To some people it looks very much like a theoretical academic subject that could only be of interest to people in ivory towers. But, on second thought, is that reasonable? Should PLM be defined by academics in ivory towers?

Perhaps not. With so many industrial companies interested in PLM, and so many vendors of PLM products and services interested in PLM, perhaps it should be left to them to agree a definition of PLM.

Bottom-Up Definition

Alternatively it could just be left to "market forces", with the largest vendors and user companies imposing their definition on everybody else.

The problem with this approach is that it could lead to several definitions with, for example, each major aerospace company having a definition it imposes on its suppliers, and each major automotive OEM doing the same.

This may be seen as a good solution by about a dozen major corporations, but would be confusing for most other companies. Usually the other companies fit into the design and supply chains of several OEMs, and would be forced to work with different definitions for each major customer.

Durability

Of course, some people would argue that a definition is not needed because, no sooner than it is agreed, it will be rendered obsolete by technological progress.

On the other hand, many people would say that a common definition of PLM, even if it is not perfect, and even if it is not expected to last for ever, would save an enormous amount of time.

Wasted Time

Currently this time is wasted as industry players have to continually explain what they are talking about when they are talking about PLM.

Wouldn't it be preferable just to have a simple definition that is agreed by all, and is circulated to the press so that, for example, when a PLM salesperson talks to a CEO, they know that the CEO will have read about the same PLM in the business press? So that, for example, when the person in a manufacturing company who is responsible for the PLM Initiative talks to the CEO, to their PLM Tiger Team, or to PLM salespeople, or even to ERP salespeople, everyone will be talking about the same PLM?

No more black looks from the CEO who is hearing something totally different from what is in the business journals. No more multiple, conflicting definitions. Wouldn't that be nice? Wouldn't that be a time-saver?

Scope

And PLM products and services being described using the same basic vocabulary? Well, yes, that would be nice as well, but maybe that's going too far, and to start with, the PLMIG should limit itself to aiming for a common definition of PLM.

This cannot be achieved simply by bringing some people together for a one-day discussion. There will have to be preparatory work, structure, and iteration of ideas. It will therefore need to be a project activity, rather than a single event. If you would like to share some thoughts on the issue of PLM Definition, please let us know at plmdefinition@plmig.com.