

Where to look for inspiration to disrupt shipbuilding?

Dr Paul Stott, Strategic Maritime (UK), 6th October 2026



Hello and thanks to those following.

My earlier blogs referred to the utility of looking externally for inspiration for disruption. A simple thing to, then, would be to benchmark what other industries are doing. Go and investigate what is happening in automotive, aerospace and other sectors – and bring in experts from other sectors to look at what we are doing in shipbuilding.

I wrote about this in a presentation I gave to SNAME in 2025 (“Is the global commercial shipbuilding industry running out of steam?”), which is available on www.strategicmaritime.co.uk. In that presentation I took the opportunity to unpack what is one of the great disruptions of the late 20th Century – IKEA.

IKEA did not invent furniture, nor did they invent flatpack self-assembly. Excellence in design and marketing are a big part of their offering but these are not per se part of the disruption. Detailed design for assembly, on the other hand, is part of the cluster of developments that led to the disruption. Prior offerings in the flatpack sector had been frustrating and difficult to assemble and resulted in relatively poor furniture. IKEA fixed that.

The IKEA disruption was predicated on:

- 1. A package that is ALWAYS complete.**
- 2. PERFECT accuracy – everything ALWAYS fits.**
- 3. Self-jigging and self-aligning parts.**
- 4. No skill or even language needed to interpret assembly drawings.**
- 5. No skill or special tools required to complete the package.**
- 6. Clever design of fastenings.**

‘Nothing new here’ I hear shipbuilders saying. That is true to an extent but the devil is in the detail. We can learn much from this in shipbuilding and I will develop that theme in the next blogs.