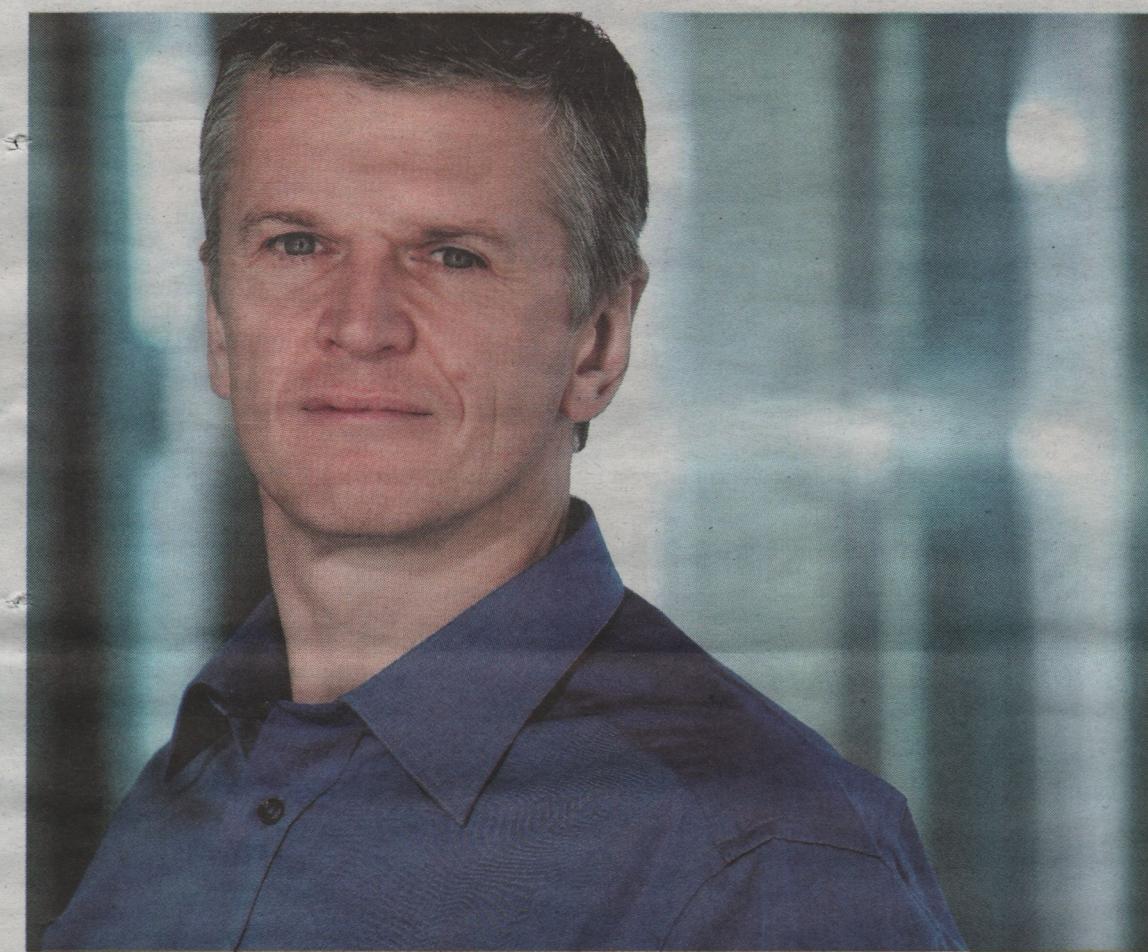




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City Diary

Martin Waller

A word in your Shell-like — it's all gibberish

An e-mail arrives. It is from Shell, the subject of embarrassing leaks this week about plans to sack 3,000 people and outsource the IT functions. It is the internal e-mail setting out the official version of events to staff. Pass by the fact that it is virtually illiterate. In it, Jerome K. Jerome, sorry, Jeroen van der Veer,

chief executive of Shell, explains that the outsourcing of jobs "is an excellent example of a function driving towards top quartile". This translates as, you're sacked, but we still get our bonuses. I am reliably informed that this is how people within Shell do talk to each other. As in "as Shell's businesses implement

their strategies to achieve 'More Upstream, Profitable Downstream' and top quartile, there has been an equal drive in the functions as well".

Gibberish. I have every sympathy with Shell IT staff who will lose their jobs. But you might end up working for someone who doesn't condescend to staff in purest management-speak.

We have all been blithely writing that Northern Rock was the first run on a British bank in living memory. Not so, says a reader; the collapse of the Israel British Bank, which despite its name was indeed British, occurred in 1974. "Depositors were queueing up at its London HQ [over Holborn Viaduct station] to withdraw their savings, causing the bank to close its doors forever. These included my colleagues who were staff of associated companies," he recalls. "I was just grateful I had not got round to transferring my personal bank account into it." I make inquiries. The bank did, indeed, go into receivership. It appears to have some link with the interminable feud between Lonrho's Tiny Rowland and Mohamed Al Fayed. An area into which I have no wish to intrude.



Here is Sir Ian McAllister, chairman of Network Rail, whose recent knighthood, I have suggested, should be taken back for the unprecedented incompetence his company displayed over the holiday period. We must use this picture again. Suggests a reader: "If the knighthood cannot be withdrawn, how about a campaign to encourage him to do the decent thing and decline it?" Hmm. Human nature being as it is... Still, a better idea occurs. He should be required to spend four days on a freezing railway station platform before the honour actually vests.

Reality bites as strike takes hold in America

The writers' strike is starting to bite in the US. The next reality TV show is Donald Trump's *Celebrity Apprentice*, with boxer Lennox Lewis and Piers Morgan, and the show will "encourage the contestants to reach out to their network of celebrity

contacts for assistance or donations". A few cheap celeb star turns, then. Trump says that, of the 100 people who applied to be on the show, "we took 14, but a couple of them cancelled because they couldn't stand the concept of being fired". That included a former baseball player. "The level of viciousness, hatred and competitiveness was unbelievable." This is a recommendation?

Channel 4 abandons its stake in Oneword for £1

Amanda Andrews

Channel 4 has sold its majority shareholding in Oneword, the national digital radio station, back to UBC Media Group for £1, amid concerns that the station is on the brink of closure.

Channel 4, which paid £1 million for its 51 per cent stake in 2005, said that it had not initiated the sale. The broadcaster said that it had been left with little choice because the station was managed by UBC, which said in November that it had written off its investment in Oneword and was looking at ways to exit the venture.

Oneword, which is aimed at ABC1 listeners and has an emphasis on literature, is understood to have lost money since its launch in 2000 and to be losing about £1 million a year. It had an average weekly reach of 151,000 listeners in the third quarter of last year, compared with the BBC7 digital station, with 795,000 listeners a week.

A message on Oneword's website

yesterday said: "The future of Oneword has been uncertain for some time now. We are carrying out a strategic review which should see a resolution in the New Year. We have currently taken down the functionality of this site and the programme pages."

Channel 4's radio ambitions came under pressure last year when Virgin Radio cut the digital radio station Virgin Radio Viva, which was aimed at women and was to launch on Channel 4's new digital radio spectrum.

It has also suffered a number of other setbacks. Global Radio, which bought Chrysalis Radio last year, has withdrawn from a joint venture to launch Sky News Radio, a national digital station, with BSkyB, which is 39.1 per cent owned by News Corporation, parent company of *The Times*. Channel 4 has said, however, that the venture could still go ahead.

The broadcaster is set to launch E4 Radio this year. Channel 4 Radio, its rival to the BBC's Radio 4, is likely to start broadcasting in 2009.

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