

Welcome to the latest edition of the microskills™ network for participants of microskills™ training around the world.

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The new organisation

A new book doing the rounds at the moment is ‘Global Remix’ by Professor Richard Scase. In it he predicts how organisations will be changing to meet the needs of the new workforce.

Scase emphasises the importance of flexibility in every aspect of employment from job description to benefits and hours and locations of work. He suggests that new employees will be more mobile physically, mentally and emotionally and will not stay with an employer who doesn’t respond to their needs.

Big, highly structured organisations will not be quick enough to adapt to these needs and so will have difficulty retaining their best staff. Instead companies will have to organise themselves into smaller, looser informal entities.

One of his favourite constructs is the ‘Café Corporation’ that harks back to the origin of the insurance industry when shippers and brokers would negotiate deals in coffee houses. It was, of course, Mr Lloyd’s coffee house in the City of London that begat insurance at Lloyd’s.

As with so many of the modern wisdoms, it has been tried before in the late 1970s with some successes.

A less attractive aspect of Scase’s view is that companies will have five groupings of employee. The ‘corporate celebrity’ will be the public face and will earn unspeakable amounts of money.

The ‘corporate lieutenant’ will be the person who converts the vision into strategy. The ‘corporate stalwart’ is the sergeant major who makes sure that things actually happen. ‘Corporate travellers’ will flit in and out, stay for a year or two and bring in new ideas and energies. They might even be on contract rather than employees.

The ‘corporate orphans’ are the people at the front line who make the product or service the customer. This labelling is rather belittling and knocks against the concept of respect for staff that some of us try to engender. It risks a distancing between what could become highly paid executives and poorly treated staff. An orphanage doesn’t sound like the warmest place to work.

Recruitment at Asda

The British supermarket group Asda, which is owned by the retail

conglomerate Walmart, has been describing its approach to recruitment and performance management. Asda has recently moved from being Britain's fourth to the second biggest supermarket chain.

The focus of the selection criteria is now on attitudes rather than competences. Their view is that they can mould people with the right values, whereas staff with the skills but the wrong approach to the business are harder to manage.

On the counter side, Asda takes a very firm line on non-performance.

For some time now we have been predicting the demise of the competence movement as being too inflexible and rigid.

This raises interesting questions about the role of education in preparing people for a world of work. Certainly employers are complaining about the lack of interpersonal skills among younger recruits and a recent employer survey valued teamworking skills above leadership skills.

Too much communication

An associate recently visited a client company where a project was running late. People in the project team spent 30% of their time in meetings, received an average 95 emails and 11 telephone calls a day and had conference calls with colleagues three evenings a week. The project manager blamed the delays on a lack of communication!

A typical employee of a complex organisation receives 57 emails a

day of which they rate 56% as unnecessary. That means that the average FTSE company pays its staff to write, send, read and delete 240,000,000 pointless emails a year.

problem ownership™

Some extra points have been added recently to the problem ownership™ model taught on microskills™ courses. The list is now:

1. A situation is a statement of affairs, something that happens and is not, in itself, a problem.
2. A problem is something that prevents the achievement of a target or objective. Therefore, you can only have a problem if you have an objective that is in jeopardy of not being met.
3. A problem is only yours if you have the authority to solve it, though you always have the authority to offer help, even if the problem holder might decide to reject it. If you do not have the authority, you can pass the problem up to your manager.
4. problem ownership™ means solving the problem if you have the authority or referring it if you don't. 'Passing the Buck' means referring the problem to someone else when you do have the authority.
5. Problems can be passed down by someone with authority telling you to sort it out, in which case you can use their authority, but confirm this with your manager first! This is 'delegation'.

6. 'Empowerment' is when you knowingly exceed your authority and you make it your problem. Most people will only empower themselves if they know that they will be supported by their manager subsequently.

7. Responsible team members will always consider the effects of their options on their colleagues before they make a decision.

8. Team members will often benefit from discussing the problem with colleagues and getting their input, experience, advice and suggestions.

9. You only ever have one chance to make a decision, because having made that decision you have changed the situation.

10. Making no decision is also a decision.

11. If the existing problems cannot be solved, because you do not have the authority, try changing the objective to one that you can achieve.

12. If you still cannot solve this problem, forget about it or live with it - it is probably actually a situation!

It is also emphasised in the 'logic + emotion = constant' model that people who are emotional often go backwards in time and become blaming. It is fairly common for comments like "why did it happen?" and "who is to blame?" to be heard. Someone who is more logical will look forward in time and ask "what can be done about it?"

So before trying to resolve the issue it is important to calm the upset person so that they will be more able to focus on the solution than the cause.

This is done by using the *EARS* microskills™.

new ways of working™ 'Facts'

A popular feature of the microskills™ network is taken from our new ways of working™ consultancy. Each edition contains some 'facts' and statistics picked up from various sources around the world. (No guarantee is given on the accuracy of these.) Whilst they are mainly from UK research, they might have relevance in other countries.

1. The bad feeling caused by poor recruitment practices hits the business's products and services too, with 53% of job seekers withdrawing their custom from the companies in question.

2. Industries experiencing the highest levels of stress at work are public administration, education and the health sector. These industries also scored lowest on employee satisfaction and engagement.

3. The number of female senior managers working in major UK businesses has taken a sharp fall of over 40% in the last five years.

4. It appears that there is a 'seven month itch' when employees begin to feel dissatisfaction with their employer.

5. British employers are overwhelmingly prejudiced against fat to the extent that fat employees are not safe in their jobs.

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(Employees might be getting fatter because they are spending more time sat at a desk in front of a computer screen.)

6. 40% of commuters would not travel to work during any future flu pandemic and substantial numbers will stay at home if there are rumours of an imminent terrorist attack. Of the people who would choose to stay at home, only a quarter could actually work remotely.

7. Recruiters are increasingly searching the Internet for information on candidates. Among the unsatisfactory traits uncovered were 'excessive alcohol abuse' and one employer even found that a candidate was on the local police wanted list. The study found that individuals most likely to leave web 'footprints' are 18-24 year-olds, using sites such as MySpace and Facebook.

Experiences, comments and questions

We always like to hear from members with any views and experiences they have either for publication or for reply off-line.

microskills™, problem ownership™ and Supportive Manager™ are part of a stable of methods used by the Tim Russell Group to train staff around the world in interpersonal skills. User organisations come from finance, travel, hospitality, retail, manufacturing, government, education, health services and telecoms. Applications range from customer service to management development, team-building to support skills, negotiations to managing meetings interviewing to selling.

new ways of working™ is the consultancy service to work with organisations on how they will be operating in areas of staff management in the future.

For more information

Contact us at:

info@TimRussellGroup.com