

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

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### Putting HR on the map

“People are our most important asset”, is the mantra spoken by CEOs across the globe and yet, ever since they were called the Welfare Department, Human Resources staff have complained about not being taken seriously by their company’s top management.

They organise a job evaluation system and managers ignore it and pay the market rate; they establish a performance appraisal scheme which nobody completes; they promote training courses and nobody turns up; they implement a staff satisfaction survey and nothing changes as a result.

Every few years they have a reorganisation and a name change, from Personnel to Human Capital to Human Assets to People and Organisation, but still they are not as influential as they crave.

Very few HR Directors even have a seat at the main board table, usually reporting through the Finance Director, Company Secretary or an Administration Director.

Most HR people are very bright and extremely hard working, so why aren’t they given recognition and what should they do about it?

Their biggest problem is that they are ‘too busy being busy’ investing huge energies on issues that are not perceived to be important by the key operational decision makers in the business.

They spend countless hours of their own (and other people’s) time collecting information, holding meetings and filling in forms - and for what end? So that the company achieves an award that can be displayed in the boardroom or a logo that can be printed on letterheads and annual reports.

Meanwhile production is being held up by a lack of skilled workers, departmental staff are resigning because of poor management and no-one can recruit cleaning staff.

So my plea to HR colleagues is this. Forget about competence studies and trying to measure everything. Forget about national awards. Forget about copying what other organisations are doing. Do you really need six sigma, six thinking hats, seven habits, fish, cheese and chicken soup?

Get out on to the shop floor, meet the front line staff, listen to the customers. Find out where the company is hurting now and what in practical terms can be done - now.

Help managers to find immediately workable solutions to real life current problems.

Ensure that line managers actually manage the *people* who report to them and not just the work they produce. The first level of people management should be the line manager with HR only coming in to support as necessary.

Computerise all the 'pay and rations' and administrative side of HR or outsource it.

Now get yourself invited to the next board meeting and find out where the business is planning to be in the next one, two, five, ten and fifteen years. Produce some practical strategic plans to ensure that the company will have the right people with the right skills in the right place at the right time.

Finally, keep up to date with all those factors that are impinging and will impinge upon the people of the company. Find out about demographic changes, national and international government policies and education systems. Read up about financial predictions, legal moves and social trends. Discover what other companies in the same and different industries are doing. Absorb it, learn from it but don't feel the need to copy it!

If people really are your most important assets, make sure that you are actively attracting, retaining and motivating them now and in the future.

## **Flexible rewards**

'Talent retention' has been high on HR agendas for several years now.

With companies increasingly measuring staff loyalty by the employee's performance rather than by their years of service, it is inevitable that staff will measure company loyalty by the extent to which their employer performs in meeting the staff's personal needs.

Using money as the sole unit of motivation and reward is rather blunt and now much less relevant than when people really needed the cash to ward off the bailiffs and risk actual starvation or homelessness.

Companies should now be looking at holistic ways of motivating people if they are to retain the very staff they need. This means personalising reward packages that match the lifestyle requirements of each individual worker.

The package should certainly include financial ingredients like salary, share options, retirement and medical benefits. But it should also contain less numerical factors like holiday and other time off provisions, flexible times and places of work, discount schemes from local suppliers, access to local sports and social clubs, training and development. The more imaginative HR are the better they can retain the company's staff.

## **Maternity blues**

An interesting tension is arising with maternity benefits. In an attempt to encourage women to have more children and so reduce the demographic hole predicted in some developed countries, governments are extending paid maternity leave. However, as this cost could be borne by companies, it seems to be an increasing barrier

to employing women of a certain age. These are the very women whose own skills are needed in the workforce today.

Employers don't want to be left holding the baby!

## microskills™ and complaints

When people are upset they often become emotional. The emotion can take several forms; anger, frustration, disappointment, even grief. As their emotion increases, their logic usually decreases and they don't always say what they mean.

Couple this with a tendency for upset people to go backwards in time and we have the reasons for some pretty strange behaviour.

At a traffic accident the victim often asks, "Didn't you see me?" or "Why did you drive into my car?" The answers, "Yes, I did see you. You were in my way" might be truthful but probably unwelcome.

(The more logical questions would be, "What are we going to do about this and who is going to pay for the damage?") The most useful course of action, though, is to give insurance details and then refer it to the insurance companies and police to resolve.

Fans of problem ownership™ will recognise that a traffic accident is a situation and not a problem.

When dealing with upset people it is a good maxim not to answer the 'questions' that the upset person asks. Of course, in microskills™ terms they are not *Asking* at all but actually *Giving Opinions*.

Acknowledge what the complainant has said by using *Reflecting* and then use *Giving Information* in a forward direction of what you are going to do (or not going to do).

For more information about microskills™, problem ownership™ and their applications, please email:

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## 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. A study reveals that 44% of respondents - all aged 20-30 - would go so far as to discount a prospective employer who did not have a satisfactory corporate social responsibility (CSR) reputation. The biggest factor in CSR was environmental concerns.

2. A recent report shows that although three quarters of respondents said flexible working is common in their workplaces, the same number of managers have had no training in how to supervise remote teams. The Tomorrow's Leaders study also shows that, while 75% believe remote workers are more productive, a third admitted they would want to monitor them closely. The report found that half the respondents believe they are not fully exploiting flexible working technology.

3. HR professionals are most likely to be unhappy in their current jobs, according to a new study of

employment attitudes across a range of sectors which also finds that over 50% of HR staff aren't happy with their work/life balance.

4. New tax laws in the UK appear to be designed to encourage employers to pay for health screening for all employees.

5. A third of 2,500 respondents quit a job because of office politics. The main reason cited for disliking fellow employees was down to their laziness, with 46% stating this as the primary gripe. The survey also found that just 24% of respondents say their job is important to them, with more than half of workers seeing their job as just a means of making money, and 16% filling the gap until something better comes along.

6. More than half of employers say school leavers often cannot function in the workplace due to a lack of basic maths and literacy.

7. British workers are increasingly suffering from 'email stress', claims a new study that found workers habitually open their email inbox over 40 times an hour.

8. Nearly half of UK employees believe their bosses are poor decision-makers. 46% of respondents do not think much of their manager's skills, citing incompetence and a lack of confidence as the reasons. Of the 3,500 workers asked, 61% said poor decision-making leaves them frustrated and results in a loss of respect for their manager, while 83% said it damages morale. More than half believe it reduces productivity. However, 82% of bosses consider the managers in

their organisation to be effective decision-makers. Sectors with the most decisive managers are retail, finance and leisure.

## **Hu is the President of China**

We have been sent a link to a hilarious video on You Tube that you might find amusing.

It is a confused telephone conversation between George W Bush and Condoleeza Rice. It can be accessed through:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jfb4YYXsUyO](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jfb4YYXsUyO).

Alternatively enter 'Bush Rice phone call' in the You Tube search box.

## **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**

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