

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

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A (belated) Happy New Year

This is the second microskills™ network news of the year - no, you didn't receive the first one.

As it was the New Year, we thought we would devote the whole edition to our newwaysofworking™ service and make some predictions for the next twelve months. But it was so depressing we tore it up and started again. It's still a pretty miserable read so we've packaged it separately and will send it out in the next few days. It's not for the faint hearted.

Meanwhile we've produced a more optimistic version and added a few slightly more inspiring bits to lighten it.

The revolution is here

For some time we have been predicting a revolution in organisational behaviour.

There is undoubtedly merit in setting objectives, measuring performance of staff and then rewarding them accordingly. People then know what is expected of them and their achievements can be recognised.

But now it has probably gone too far. The behaviours are being set on shorter and shorter time scales and, in some cases, have ceased to be meaningful. What value is there

to the customer if the supermarket check out staff can scan 60 items a minute, faster than you can pack them? What good are short waiting times at doctors' surgeries if all the GP does is refer you to a specialist?

Staff are working harder and longer hours, often without associated rewards, and stress levels are increasingly dramatically.

In previous editions, we have mentioned the suicides at Telstra, the Australian telco, and the Premier League soccer managers who are fired after only six matches.

The competence movement is now eventually being seriously discredited by studies in the US and the UK that are showing that people who score highly on all the company's competence criteria can still be useless performers and alienate their colleagues.

There has been a recent change of government in Australia, there will be one in the United States and there is plummeting popularity of leadership in the UK and many other western countries. There are unpopular wars and military occupations and insufficient action being taken on the really crucial areas of global survival. And daily there are revelations of more

scandals and corruption in high places.

The days of short term individualism, consumerism and greed appear to be drawing to a close. Students of political history will recognise many of the same symptoms appeared towards the end of the Thatcher administration in the UK almost twenty years ago and the McMillan government twenty five years before that.

It is no coincidence that there was Management by Objectives (MbO) in the 1950s, Key Result Areas (KRAs) in the 1980s and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). All of these systems started life with fanfares for the perfect ways to run a business. All were implemented beyond their usefulness and achieved a level where their pain was greater than their benefit.

New words are now being heard. "Time for change" was Kevin Rudd's catchphrase in the Australian general election. "Change" punctuates most sentences uttered by Barack Obama. And change it might be with a first black or female American president.

"Sustainability", "connectedness" and "collaboration" are the modern mantra in western organisational thinking. They are quoted continually by the business leaders and conference gurus, some of whom brought us MbO, KRAs and KPIs!

At least, these words are new to the western world. Asian philosophers have been expounding this wisdom for centuries!

But before the clear skies, there are a lot of clouds to pass.

In the next few days we'll send out the depressing edition of microskills™ network news which predicts some of the pain that we might have to suffer in the year to come.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Eight in 10 HR professionals believe corporate social responsibility (CSR) will become a more important part of their job within the next five years. However, less than a third of respondents say their organisation has a CSR policy and 63% believe their CSR activities are for external PR value rather than being built into company culture.

Books

Fans of 'Blink', the book that claims that most important resolutions are made, not by detailed analysis, but in the blink of an eye, will have appreciated the decision by Adam Gilchrist, the Australian cricketing legend, to retire from the game. His decision was made "between the ball hitting my gloves and the ball hitting the ground."

A brilliant cricketer, 'Gilly' has also been a role model of leadership and fair play so his autobiography should be a good read when it comes out.

Tim Harford's 'The Logic of Life' has some interesting chapters on why CEOs are paid so very much more than managers and how 'tournament theory' makes many people's working lives miserable.

The author of the 'Undercover Economist', Harford's books are very readable and thought provoking, as he applies economic theories to human behaviour and management practices.

Whether companies are that devious or he just fits the theories to the facts after the event is for the reader to decide.

More distractions at work

Managers are now alert to staff watching TV at their desks when they should be working. BBC television has recently launched iPlayer where TV programmes can be downloaded or watched over the internet for up to seven days after broadcast.

It works on the same basis as the BBC radio 'Listen again' function but, for copyright reasons, can only be accessed within the UK.

Fans of Big Brother can still watch that streamed live twenty four hours a day over the 'net. Or they could get a life of their own!

Kitchen Table Charities

A recent exposé by journalists of a national newspaper uncovered that for every one pound spent on charity Christmas cards only two pence actually went to a charity.

So for those of us concerned that some of our charitable donations are being eaten up by administrative overheads, marketing and salary costs, www.KitchenTableCharities.org is well worth a visit. It is a federation of micro charities that make small but meaningful contributions to people's lives and every penny given goes directly to help, as all

administration is by unpaid volunteers.

It was founded recently by the BBC radio interviewer, John Humphrys, who is well known for terrorising politicians and is a master of the microskills™ Asking/Giving Opinion ambiguity.

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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