

## ***Virtual Teams – The HR Dilemma***

In an earlier article I mused about the use of Iris recognition. Apparently the bars in the coloured part of the eye are a great signature of the body able to give a recognition to error rates of  $10^{24}$  – which is about the number of atoms in the Earth! And the whole measurement can be made at a distance without my being actively involved with the process. Soon machines will look at us, recognise us, and apply adequate security at all times, in all systems, at all levels – I suggested. But not only that, the machine looks at me, recognises me and brings all my information to me – wherever I might be! I will now be able to work from anywhere I choose, from home, any office in the company, any office in the world, or even peripatetically as I move around!

In the old days, paper was an anchor. We had to travel to work, which was a location not an activity, in order to access the paper archives. You remember those rows of steel filing cabinets which required an army of servants to keep them in the order necessary to allow the information to be conveniently extracted...

In the *e*-world where information is stored electronically then it is silly to have to travel miles every day just to access it! Remote working is a trend that will develop during the next few years. In fact as I write this I am sitting in my office at home, having just checked my *e*-mails, electronic calendar, accessed files on my office computer and checked the office answering machine. All the people with whom I have had interactions today probably assume that I was sitting “at work”.

Now most people think that working at home is difficult – just think of all those distractions... However, I came across a new statistic the other day. I was reading Prof Richard Scase’s book “Britain in 2010”. In this book he suggests that by 2010 the predominant household type will be people living (by choice) on their own. And once your living accommodation is totally within your own control, then being able to work there becomes a great asset. For those choosing to still co-habit – I see the advent of “Office Bureau”, that is small fully facilitated office complexes near to your home that will reduce commuting – another essential trend reduction suggested by Prof Scase.

So we become people working in isolation. Well, not actually isolated because the advent of new communication technologies will allow us to inter-relate – have you seen the new video conversation capability in Windows XP? But we will be disparate and that opens up the HR dilemma. Just how are you going to motivate someone that you never meet? How are you going to control someone that you never come into contact with? Just how are you going to deal with the “cyber-skivers”?

## *Looking at the Future Slightly Differently*

I have always found it fascinating that the immediate reaction to any change is that it is going to be bad, rather than enhancing the way we can work and live. After all, TV did not kill the cinema – it enhanced peoples awareness of films and now more people go to the cinema than at any time in the past.

I do however see problems with virtual teams and people working at disparate locations. The first problem will be to “stop people working”. It is readily acknowledged that in the UK we work longer hours an other European countries. The two hours travelling to and from work will be seen as “work time” and be added to the day. With remote working we will have to change our metrics and judge worth by Out-Put, not In-Put. If I give you a job that is judged to be 5 day’s work, and you finish in 4 days – then there is no profit for either of us demonstrating that you sat there for another day to fulfill the time criteria. We are going to have to TRUST! Oh yes, in cyberspace there will be skivers – but these will be the same people that used to skive whilst sitting at a wooden desk in the old system – Out-Put metrics will be a big challenge to them.

Another trend for the future is the “portfolio career” i.e. working for a number of employers in rapid succession – In fact, you might soon be working for a number of different employers at the same time. Working from a comfortable, convenient, local environment will enhance these possibilities.

Call Centres could be the first to benefit from remote working....