

**7<sup>th</sup> TOURISM HUMAN RESOURCES CONFERENCE 2014**

**TOBAGO 29-31 OCTOBER 2014**

**ACHIEVING HIGH PERFORMANCE IN CARIBBEAN TOURISM**

**IN THE NEW, NETWORKED WORK ENVIRONMENT**

**Organised by the**

**Caribbean Tourism Organisation**

**In collaboration with the**

**Division of Tourism and Transportation, Tobago House of Assembly**

***THE CHANGING NATURE OF WORK AND THE WORKSPACE***

In 1893 New Zealand became the first country in the world to give women the right to vote. To mark the centenary of this achievement, in 1993 a series of prints were released from the National Archives called *Women at Work at the Turn of the Century*. They portrayed women in occupations of the day – nurses, flax cutters, factory workers, cleaners and taking afternoon tea – the only way then to keep abreast of happenings in the community.

We are bemused today at the both the work being undertaken and the processes used (as well as the clothing and hair styles!).

But in 20, 30, 100 years' time we here today – height of fashion and style as we all are with the very latest in technological gadgets – will be seen as similarly out-dated.

Change has always been a constant in the nature, form and focus of work with technological developments playing a major role in influencing the content, structure and processes of work and workspaces. The reaction to such inevitable changes has also remained constant.

- Assertions that the way things have always been done is by far the best
- Predictions that the new-fangled idea won't catch on
  - *"There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home"*  
Ken Olsen, Digital Equipment Corp, 1977
- Assertions that the new technology or processes (whatever they may be) will lead to high unemployment and the end of civilisation as we know it
- Ultimate acceptance that the changes were beneficial...

One of the more extreme examples was the prohibition by the city of Cologne in 1412 of the production of spinning wheels by local craftsmen because it feared unemployment among textile manufacturers who used a hand spindle. In the 18<sup>th</sup> Century the newly-invented spinning machine allowed one worker to produce the amount of yarn previously produced by 200 individuals using spinning wheels. This gave rise to the Luddite movement – English textile artisans who protested violently against this labour-saving machinery between 1811 and 1817.

What has progressed positively over the years is the recognition that change must be well-managed; that all those affected - or even have the potential to be affected - must understand the reasons for the changes and what actual impact those changes will have on them. It makes the role of HR Manager even more crucial to an organisation.

What is probably most striking in technological developments over the last 10 – 20 years have been the devices that enable one to be connected at all times. A change so dramatic that it has totally redefined “work” and the “workspace” as we traditionally knew them to be.

A quiz!

I want you to answer honestly to yourselves whether you have used your electronic device – i-phone, i-pad, PC, Blackberry – for work reasons

- In a meeting with colleagues
- In a meeting with people outside your organisation
- At dinner with your spouse / partner
- At a social gathering with friends
- At your child's sporting / school event

- While driving
- In bed
- On holiday
- While at a conference listening to a key note speaker talking about the changing nature of work and the workspace!

For too many, work is now 24/7 and the workspace is wherever your electronic device happens to be. That in turn leads to two areas for consideration. Working in an office, or on the employer's premises or even in the same country is no longer a requirement. Individualism – where, when and how a person chooses to work – is the new paradigm.

In light of this reality, I am going to focus on four areas:

- Individualism / meritocracy versus management hierarchy / seniority
- Communication with and management of people
- Work / family integration
- Role of the customer

### **Meritocracy versus Hierarchy**

According to the Economist Intelligence Unit in a report *Agent of Change, The future of technology disruption in business* in the 3 October 2014 issue of The Economist, the year 2020 will see a sharp decline in small and medium enterprises with the focus being on very large organisations on the one hand and micro businesses or individual contractors on the other. Back-room functions (accounting, IT, payroll, marketers, secretaries etc) will be outsourced but more importantly, the way teams are put together to solve problems and undertake specific areas of work will change. Small, virtual companies are capable of rapidly bringing together ad hoc teams of specialists from around the world to solve particular challenges. This in turn will require flatter management structures with many believing the role of generalist “manager” will disappear.

Advances in collaboration will enable individuals to team up as needed to solve problems of all kinds from building an organisation-specific app to developing a new logarithm for routing freight. These on-line exchanges allow individuals or

small teams to build effective public profiles which mean third parties are willing to collaborate with them.

The underlying notion therefore of a move from hierarchies to meritocracies is simple. When an individual's contribution is measured by their ability to input meaningfully in order to solve a problem, they become visible within the organisation. An example might be a law firm, where someone posts a client problem on an internal collaborative tool, enabling anyone to contribute ideas and offer help. Traditional measures, such as age, years of experience or prestige of qualifications or status, become less relevant in determining an employee's worth.

Such a scenario puts real meaning into the requirement for "life-long learning". Individuals will need to do more to reskill themselves and will have to constantly do so over time. It also means that fewer people are likely to have fixed contracts with more becoming freelance contractors selling their skills to larger organisations. Decentralisation will continue not only because of cost pressures but also because of an acceptance that flexible working practices make sense to employers and employees.

### **Communication with and Management of People**

In keeping with the organisational changes, managers will no longer focus on having employees comply with rules and instructions, but rather to ensure commitment to organisational goals and missions. As employees gain more decision making authority and latitude due to reduced hierarchical decision making, managers become more supporters rather than commanders.

The challenge for organisations – and particularly HR managers - is how to keep workers engaged and connected. In the UK, over 4 million people usually worked from home in 2013 – 65% of them male – with many more millions sometimes working from home<sup>1</sup>. To manage this effectively requires employers to trust staff and to recognise that people can feel isolated if the relationship is not managed properly.

The General Secretary of the UK Trades Union Congress, Frances O'Grady said in a release in May 2014 "With government figures showing a further 4.5 million

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<sup>1</sup> UK Office for National Statistics May 2014

people would like to work from home more often there is still much more that employers can do to meet this unmet demand for more flexible working.” She went on to say "Employers who offer the flexibility that workers want will be best placed to attract, retain and motivate good staff."

The best way to manage employees working from home or remotely is by encouraging independence of thought and action, and developing continuous communication, supported by regular face-to-face meetings. This can be by video/conference calls or other online tools so that experiences, ideas, and success and performance issues can still be shared.

People identify themselves by their work and work groups and still want to engage and meet up with others. This means a different type of work space being developed. Shared work spaces, hot-desking where workers can come in for specific periods, work hubs – small centres at the periphery of towns and cities where local workers can drop in as needed, either to join a telepresence meeting or else simply to work in the company of others for a few hours, are all examples of making sure technology doesn't remove people from people.

Technology is already being used in the hospitality industry to “manage” people. The @goRoster app (<http://www.goroster.com>) has a roster design that a manager can use to visualise future work schedules. The costs for rosters are automatically calculated as they are built. The app will warn if an employee has requested leave for the period that is being rostered for and show what the employee's preferred work hours are – being able to accommodate exam timetables and even second jobs. A push of a button communicates the roster to employees by SMS and /or email and automatically receives and collates responses.

So, does that mean that all HR communication can be done by text message or email – including terminating someone's employment? The clear answer in jurisdictions that have the same British-based understating of natural justice as the Caribbean does, is “No”. There are a number of cases in various Industrial Tribunals and Courts in New Zealand and Australia where texts saying “No need to come into the Salad Bowl today. We'll be in touch”...and “Your employment is terminated effective immediately” were held to be procedurally unfair and thus unjustified. An adjudicator went as far in a case in NZ last year as to say “*I have to say that both [the employee and the employer] relied far too much on obscure*

*text messages; a matter that appears far too often in cases before the Authority these days. Indeed, it sometimes seems that some people have lost the ability, or inclination, to actually speak to each other at all.”<sup>2</sup>*

Communication of expectations and management of people to ensure those expectations are fulfilled are as important now as they ever have been and will likely gain, if anything, more importance as the diffused workplace becomes more of a reality.

### **Work / Family Integration**

The focus in recent times has been on Work / Life Balance as though the two areas are mutually exclusive and one can be weighed against the other. This was never a reality – no-one forgets the concerns about a sick child or death of a relative or difficulty paying the rent just because you happen to be at work. And likewise, no-one forgets the deadline of a piece of work or differences of opinion within the work team just because you happen to be at home. However it is different *thinking* about an issue or spending an allotted time after dinner dealing with a work issue than the 24/7 culture we have now. Your answers to the quiz earlier clearly show that home is no longer a refuge and neither is the commute to work nor an evening out with friends nor a holiday...and soon not even an airplane journey will be a haven from the incessant intrusion of a mobile phone. A recent survey<sup>3</sup> undertaken for Expedia of 8,560 people in 25 countries asked how many took their employer-provided electronic devices on holiday. Norway topped the rankings with 83% - against an average of 63%. So much for taking a break and coming back refreshed.

Technology is clearly a two-edged sword. It can free people from a desk, allowing more work flexibility but on the other hand it is more difficult to disconnect in an always-on world. What this means is a need to recognise that information overload can lead to paralysis and a deterioration in any sort of balanced life!

To achieve a work / family or work / life integration, workers will need to choose just how engaged they wish to be. Employee involvement is crucial in determining just what flexible work patterns will be. Labour laws must be reformed to enhance

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<sup>2</sup> Griffiths v A1 Bobcats and Concrete Ltd [2013] NZERA Auckland 74

<sup>3</sup> 2014 Expedia / Egencia Mobile Index Global Survey

worker voice and improve flexibility for both employers and employees. Parties closest to the problems must be involved in shaping their own solutions. Quality part time jobs, flexible working hours, portable benefits and more women in leadership positions are the policies that need to be implemented but of even more importance is to share control and responsibility with employees.

- Front line employees and supervisors know their work practices best and must be empowered to come up with their own suggestions;
- Employees (men and women) must be engaged to change a prevailing workplace culture where it is feared that use of part-time or flexible work options will hurt one's career progression. Unless this happens flexible policies will continue to be underutilised.
- Dialogue must take place among work group members to overcome subtle resistance by supervisors and resentment by other workers.

The workplace of the future will be one where a high level of trust and communication - from both sides - will be vital for survival.

### **Role of the Customer**

In the Economist Intelligence Unit report<sup>4</sup>, one of the most interesting survey answers showed that chief executives of the largest companies considered that by 2020 the main source of new product and service ideas would be customers (30%) and online communities (19%) compared with R&D today. The use of technology in allowing organisations to interact with customers from augmented reality that brings products to life in both physical and virtual stores to location-based services enabled by smart phones will support the personalisation approach that the new individual focus calls for. And the ability of the customer to respond – immediately – to good or bad services or products is yet another issue that must be managed.

Sites such as TripAdvisor and Booking.com enable a customer to give their views to a globalised world as compared to a few friends and family who might have feigned interest before about the marvellous / terrible meal out they had while visiting Saint Lucia. And of course the ubiquitous habit of taking photos of the

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<sup>4</sup> Agent of Change: The Future of Technology Disruption in Business – A report from the Economist Intelligence Unit Sponsored by RICOH in The Economist magazine 3 October 2014

meal you are about to eat and putting it on your Facebook page highlights the immediacy of the impact of good or bad reviews. It is increasingly difficult to hide bad behaviour, high prices or poor service when customers have a means of broadcasting this to the world instantly and at zero cost.

This then means an enhanced role for HR managers. It is not only important for a company – particularly in the hospitality / tourism sector – to know what is being said about their business and to respond, but it can also be a useful guide to employee behaviours that should either be acknowledged positively - or otherwise. If three out of five responses on TripAdvisor say the greeting at reception was less than friendly, then further training may be urgently called for. If, on the other hand, an employee is continually singled out for praise, then that too should be recognised. Policies around the interface between employees and customers may need to be reviewed in light of this phenomenon, however. Many customers do not appreciate having the TripAdvisor Award sign pointed out to them on their departure from the restaurant / hotel / tour and being asked pointedly to give a positive review...

The old adage “the customer is king” has a new resonance when greater transparency - thanks to greater access to information via price-comparison and service-rating tools - enables pressure to be put on uncompetitive organisations. The workplace of the future, and the workers in it or associated with it, will need to factor that accessibility to previously-considered commercially sensitive information as the price for an enhanced reputation that enables the enterprise to withstand the challenges of changes that might otherwise threaten its very viability.

So, to polish off my crystal ball (in the hope that I might do better than the editor of *The Times* of London who wrote in 1894 that in 50 years’ time the streets of London would all be under nine feet of horse manure) my view of work in the future is that it will be more:

- Cognitively complex
- Team-based and collaborative
- Dependent on technological competence
- Time pressured

- Mobile and less dependent on geography.

Organisations will be:

- Leaner and more agile
- More focused on identifying value from the customer's perspective
- More tuned to dynamic competitive requirements and strategy
- Less hierarchical in structure and decision making authority
- Less likely to provide life long careers and job security
- Continually reorganising to maintain or gain competitive advantage.

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