Solved!   Remote working opens up opportunities for enterprise and explosion in skills for the 21st century.

By Peter Fox, who drew the blueprint

Where is the office of the 21st century? Why are we not all working from home? It's ten years since the millennium yet all we have is *social* networking - which is like saying we have the works canteen but not the works!

The key to organising for a *purpose* - essential for any serious enterprise - has now been found - and it opens up a host of very exciting possibilities for the ways we organise work, cooperate and develop skills. Remote workers must be loyal and contented so the factory of the future is built around people and their temperaments. It is all very neat, simple and easy to understand - all you need is three people and carry on from there.

Magically this opens up opportunities for learning and experience that conventional working practices don't: Piecemeal and focussed on specialist subjects you can't learn in school or don't register on an employer's list of essential knowledge. This will mean lots of specialists at leading-edge and niche technologies available on-tap as required which lift traditional businesses out of the muddle-through-that'll-do culture to being 'powered throughout by experts'.

Three branches

When people are remote they need to be well motivated - or else work gets put-off. One of the keys to this is matching a person's temperament to their role. For example you wouldn't want somebody who doesn't feel comfortable talking to customers in sales or a wildly optimistic target-driven salesman in charge of finances. There is a very cool split of the function of an organisation that matches basic temperaments.

Left branch	Middle branch	Right branch
Creating and developing	Servicing the organisation	Outward-facing

For example the lady that stands in the street collecting for the RNLI and the guy who services the boat engines both want to stick to their patch. The lady collector (right branch) is happy to deal with the public, and the mechanic (middle branch) is happy to take responsibility for doing a job that other people depend on, but quite possibly

neither would be comfortable in the other's role. Each branch has a *Champion* who's job is to build and maintain a happy and efficient workforce.

Treems

Because of the limitations in communication over the Internet it is difficult to get to know people well enough to trust them and share responsibilities smoothly. The answer is to reduce the number of colleagues a person has to work with to the minimum. Ask any organiser and they'll tell you groups of three work the best. The object is to build team loyalty and focus on specific jobs. Furthermore, although it may often need guidance, a team should be able to organise work for itself, bringing 'pride of ownership' into play.
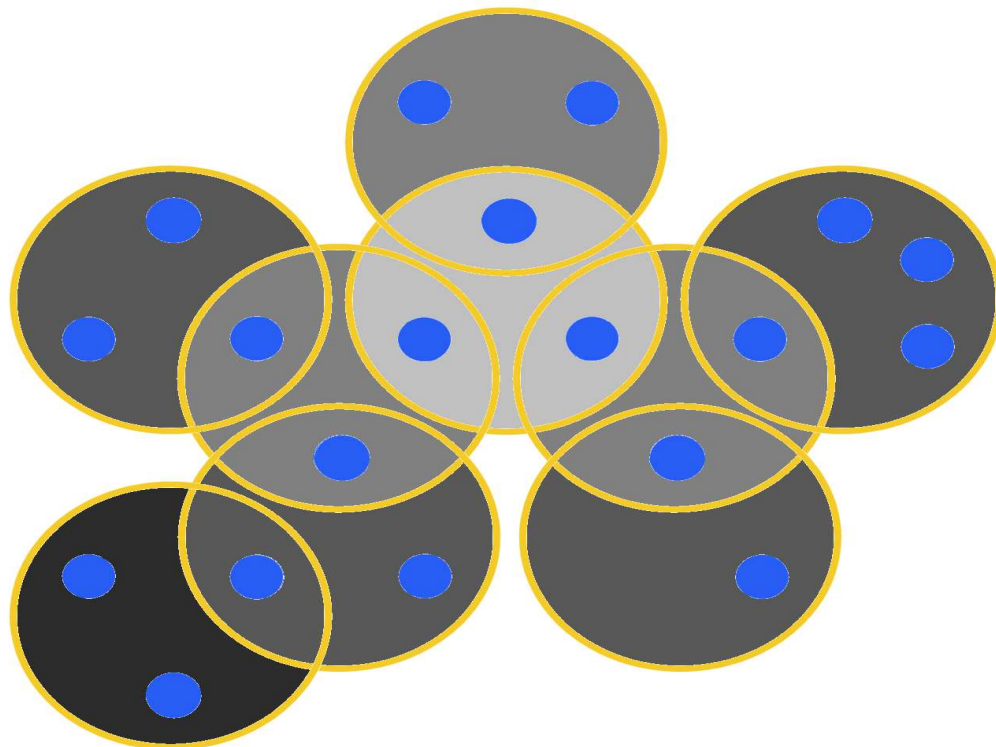
An enterprise is formed by linking these teams of three together. It is easy to see how an organisational tree can be built in this way. This gives us the downward command and control structure. A *Chief* is somebody with the responsibility for getting the work done. (*Champions* look after the *means* of production.) In some respects chiefs will exist at all but the lowest level, with many people being team leaders and thus responsible for what's happening in their treem. The key to being a chief is competency in a given field coupled with a good appreciation of how their function fits into the whole scheme of things. In traditional terms we would call chiefs "managers".

Communicating upwards and across the organisation

In a face-to-face world there are opportunities to make feelings known about stupid decisions, unreasonable requests and incompetent colleagues. These don't exist in the virtual world of remote networking - There are no corridors or canteens to moan in. Therefore we invent the *Grumblee* - a person who's job is to be moaned to, and hopefully address the issues in a knowledgeable and diplomatic fashion. The object of this is to stop groups being sidetracked from getting on with their work into general wandering discussion and spleen-venting. The Grumblee is an important and powerful role who should hear of things that simply aren't right before they become major handicaps.

The other source of distractions are policy discussions. It is important to agree on what's to be done then get on and do it - not keep raking up old agendas. So policy matters are explicitly dealt with at a *Moot*. This is the exact meaning of "moot point" one where we'll have to defer until we're gathered specifically to discuss the specific issue. Moots can happen at all levels and concern many people. The key is having a set agenda to discuss a particular issue. Within a treem somebody might call for a moot when circumstances change or a policy decision is required - a bit like calling a 'time-out'. This means that decision-making is organised, shared, open and recorded.

Communication and agreeing to do work up and down the organisation tree is made easy by the fact that members of treems are shared between levels. However working across the tree where different treems have different outlooks, needs and capabilities is much more tricky. For example the sales people want samples as soon as possible but the development team are not happy letting them have early, buggy, models. The foundation of this sort of collaboration is some sort of contract where the goals of each party are understood and their obligations are signed-up to.

Major implications for industry and individuals

The ease of 'part-time' or 'as-required' remote working means that enterprises can employ skills and knowledge on-demand. For example practically every organisation needs a Systems Administrator or public relations person, but for many it is impossible to justify a full-time employee. So what happens is that somebody who just happened to be handy, isn't trained, isn't experienced and doesn't really want the job is given this as an ad-on to their official role. So the dismal effects of shoddy bodging should become a thing of the past.

This begs the question how skills are made available for hire. One possible answer is to re-invent the medieval craft guilds. This would mean that standards are set and business relationships are standardised. The guild would provide a reliable guide to the actual competence, reliability and suitability of a craftsman. Furthermore with today's many-branched and rapidly evolving technologies we want to encourage high levels of attainment in niches which isn't possible 'in school'.

Treems have enormous potential to be skill incubators. Their hierarchical tight-knit communities are ideal for tagging-on juniors at the bottom to learn the basics then be mentored in real-life practical situations. Some will be set up with this specific objective with 'useful actual results' as a bonus. In other cases treem members will have the confidence of their colleagues while getting to grips with something new that will help everyone. This concept of making it easy to delegate and grow members

means that people who would never otherwise have an opportunity to learn skills and acquire experience can become part of the knowledge-based society. Remote networking means that rare experience can be made available anywhere in order to lead and tutor. For example a retired crystallographer living in Cornwall could have the role of mentor in business to a redundant miner from Scotland while receiving encouragement themselves to manage the organisation's intellectual property assets.

Conclusion

The blueprint for the factories and offices of the 21st century has been drawn. It means a radically new organisation structure designed to deal with the difficulties of remote electronic working. The benefits through flexibility, lower overheads and the ability to use and nurture a much richer variety of focussed skills are enormous. The implications for individuals wanting to become part of the knowledge-based economy are startling - Getting started will be easier and finding a market for high levels of specialist knowledge and experience will be easier - Oh and you can work from home.

More information

Download the book and other articles from http://vulpeculox.net/treems.

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