**Office life… It's rubbish…**

You know that I love a quote. Here is a doozy: "conversation is the fine art of mutual consideration and communication about matters of common interest that basically have some human importance".

These words of wisdom are attributed to Ordway Tead, an American "organisational theorist" (no idea what that is) who was a professor of industrial relations at Columbia University.

The reason why I was inspired to search out such commentary was as a result of the feedback I have had "on the road" this summer when giving presentations to businesses about the forthcoming disability discrimination. This particular characteristic is being added to the discrimination stable on 1 September 2018 (together with new family-friendly rights and the removal of the retirement age).

The consistent feedback that I have received from the presentations is that the office environment has changed dramatically since the introduction of the discrimination law back in 2014. Yes, it is that long ago. It seems that the manner in which we communicate with our colleagues in the office has undergone a fundamental change and perhaps not for the better.

In some cases, other than the exchange of normal courtesies (ie hello, goodbye, please pass the cookie jar), it seems many people are simply not communicating with their colleagues in what one might describe a natural human way. Some cannot be bothered to even express opinions or challenge ideas for fear of backlash, isolation or ultimately, the worst case scenario, job loss. This cannot be right. Why is this? Is the modern fear of causing offence or being aggressive to blame? To cause offence is to hurt feelings and causing offence is a high crime for a highly subjective reaction to what we say. Is it the fear of hurting feelings that is destroying the informality and spontaneity of communication with our colleagues? It provides for a sterile, uncreative and uninspiring environment. How is this beneficial to staff and business?

I am not an expert in this field but it seems to me that there can be no doubt that when employees avoid engaging with each other both productivity and job satisfaction must be impacted. Why pussyfoot about am I allowed to use that terminology? It is impacted severely. I suspect that this sterile environment has additional effects such as absenteeism and health issues. That is not how it was when I started out and frankly, it is not how it should be now.

Of course, the virtue spewing liberal elite will say that this is not the case and that these laws are essential in the 21st century. Perhaps, but with all things, there needs to be a balance. There is no doubt that there are groups in society who need the protection of sensible legislative intervention but on occasion, it can go too far. Our desire to fall at the feet of the liberalists and international "progressives" needs to be contained.

People have also talked about the fact that the modern open office has become an anachronism. Employees have expressed alarm at the higher noise levels (clearly not from people chatting) and the lack of privacy. There is no doubt that the open office causes significant distraction both from the human and the machine. Once again this cannot have a positive effect on the employee or employee relations generally albeit I do not blame the liberalati for this particular woe!

I understand that there is a move to return to the traditional office environment. Hooray. GDPR (with its clean desk policy) might be a further catalyst for this change.

In addition, there is now a greater tendency to work from home, “hot desk” or sit on a beach working remotely. Perhaps the necessity for an office as we know is on the wane.

Is it time to put the brakes on nanny state oversight of the office environment? Why can’t we humans manage ourselves? We have done so for thousands of years.

Or perhaps this is just a figment of my deteriorating imagination and reflects my somewhat advancing years and a rather more curmudgeonly view of office life. Let’s wait and see.