

Brake Terence, *Where in the World is My Team? Making a Success of Your Virtual Global Workplace*

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Reviewed by Dr. George Simons at www.diversophy.com

Terence Brake, expert in global talent development, has taken up the challenge of writing a book for the print market that multitasks. The book has a manifold mission. *Where in the World is my Team*:

- Presents us with members of a virtual team and their stakeholders on their home turf, ethnocentricities and eccentricities in plain view, struggling to communicate internally and externally.
- Tells their story in quasi-novel form, though perhaps more blog-as-novel, through the eyes of Will Williams, a fictional denizen of a software concern known as the Funhouse, who is seeking to grow up emotionally as well as carry out an assignment for She, the boss lady.
- Illustrates and presents best practice for global teamwork clearly enough to be useful to the organizational or entrepreneurial reader facing the challenge of working in or managing such a team.



Let's look at these tasks one at a time.

The UK view of the virtual team. When one opens the pages of this very British book, it is clear that, however distributed the team, the protagonist's team perspective is in London, geographically, culturally and linguistically. So, we are treated to a look at the palaver, the behaviors, the quirks as well as the organizational and interpersonal dynamics of one contemporary London shop. A bewildering challenge, perhaps, for readers from other, even Anglophone cultures. Taken in the lighthearted sense in which it is written, Brake has nonetheless provided a literary cultural immersion for the unsuspecting foreigner, who, betimes, may have to google words and phrases and search the OED to understand what is going on. In the spirit of the story, perhaps one should take the practical shortcut of courting a British lover as a reference guide. Master the plot of this book, however, and you will probably have acquired enough cultural basics to sort out the Brits on your team and understand at least a few of their befuddling *behaviours*. Mission number one, delivered with fun.

Creating a quazy novella aims at making a winding learning curve that is less winding—at least one breathes easier once one masters the language. Will Williams, in trying “to get a life,” like many of us, has a job in which he is given the task of researching what makes contemporary teams work and what can be done to make them work better. So it is his story. Storytelling helps us make sense out of what takes place between us. Concatenating tales, as Brake does in this novella, not only lets one see into the life of a global team member, but encourages the reader to reflect on and share with teammates his or her own story as a part of creating new stories together. Scary at start, but potentially confidence building in the end. And, *trust* is without a doubt the critical foundation of global collaboration. Mission number two, it's up to you.

Best practice for global teamwork, emerges from this story line a piece at a time. Sometimes it shows up in Will Williams' insights and frequent notes to himself. Sometimes it is provided in larger chunks in deliberately focused discussions between the players in the drama—a bit *deus ex machina*, but not in poor taste. All of this leads up to the denouement; Will's presenting a briefing report on "Global Virtual Team Essentials." His report forms the final chapter of the book, which is, in fact, the course in a nutshell, a useful compendium of GVT good practice. If you are not into the novella, you could immediately flip to the end for the linear overview, but you will miss learning experiences that explore and lead up to this final digest. Mission number three, what will *your* team be?

The book closes with a glossary of "Useful Terms—for those still wrestling with the new workplace." These reduce google time while reading the book, but, be alert to the fact that language, particularly at the interface of technology and humanity, is a moving target. Not only are different words being used in different places, but new ones are being created daily in our high-rise towers of electronic babble.

With the current financial crisis, the buzz word is *green*. Many pundits are placing their bets on a green revolution in how we learn and do business virtually. Representing the world of staffing, coaching, consulting and training as Brake and many of us do, this is an opportunity. But, we face the challenge of building solid realities out of traveling electrons that will serve the real people of our world, given their everyday stories of living and working with each other. Whatever the culture and the distance that separates us we are all part of the same novel.

I was told the other day that it takes the energy in a piece of coal the size of a fist to transmit 2mb of information on the net. Hopefully, this is urban legend, but current solid research estimates that electronics use about 8% of the total energy supply. Virtual may look cheaper and greener, but how we use that to our advantage requires not only the economies brought about by best practices but continued innovation on both the technical and social levels. Despite seeming emergence of what look like boilerplate solutions in both the intercultural and global teamwork areas, this work is only in its infancy.

I can't resist ending this one-way chat with a smiley. I wonder if Brake has also used the novella as an excuse to tap the fountain of youth by writing from the perspective of someone a couple of generations younger than himself. If he found it, I might try it myself.