

## Don't fret over gloomy forecasts

<http://archive.gulfnews.com/articles/09/01/13/10274577.html>

01/12/2009 11:31 PM | By Carole Spiers, Special to Gulf News

The first days of 2009 have proved fertile ground for forecasts by business experts, with the public taking a greater-than-usual interest in world economic prospects at this critical moment.

In the UK, the outlook for the human resource profession has been debated with enthusiasm, and the following consensus has emerged. (Regular readers may recognise one or two themes that have popped up over time.)

First, the dynamics of the typical HR department. This will be a leaner and meaner team, who will have to fight for their budgets and focus sharply on redundancy and restructuring (instead of recruiting and retaining), and to understand and manage people-related costs in a disciplined way.

Lines between EAP, occupational health, wellness and other HR benefits will be less distinct. And the team may need to fall back on well-positioned freelancers to compensate for the loss of full-time managers.

Second, what new attitudes are likely to prevail? An odd mix of 80's-style, macho management along with a cautious outlook that may threaten innovations. An urgent need to give emotional support to redundant personnel who may be uncomfortably 'soul searching'. And how to recognise and cope with one's own 'survivor syndrome' - that is, the feeling of being the last one standing, while you supervise a redundancy programme.

And third, any benefits that may come out of the shake-up? A well-earned reward to those teams who can maintain their focus on critical long-term issues and not be distracted by short-termism. Possible opportunities to implement low-cost options that have been dismissed in the good times. And the usual upside to any recession - plentiful access to good new personnel for those companies who are successfully weathering the storm.

If some of these forecasts have got you depressed, then let me offer you a glimmer of cheer.

Having steered my own international stress consultancy through two major recessions, I have got in the habit of logging the more widely-repeated forecasts and checking their accuracy.

The truth is that very few forecasts are accurate; it stands to reason that only a small minority of commentators actually get it right (and are automatically dismissed as mad), and it is they who rightly profit from their astute reading of the situation.

Looking back on past forecasts, you realise that they are really a branch of entertainment. Yet we have a strong psychological need to hear forecasts. So all these formal predictions for the 12 months ahead should be treated like any other long-range projection - merely a rough estimate of what might happen.

But perhaps the UAE is familiar with the old Arab saying 'Those who claim to forecast the future are lying, even if by chance they are later proved to be right'.

*- The writer is a BBC broadcaster and motivational speaker, with 20 years experience as CEO of Carole Spiers Group, an international stress consultancy based in London.*