

Preparing for 2022

The year 2021, is undoubtedly one that will be remembered for generations to come. Workers have had to endure many changes, struggles and uncertainty as the world experienced several challenges that have impacted on the operations of workplaces. It simply has not been business as usual. The myriad of challenges and forced changes brought on by the COVID 19 Pandemic, along with the continued economic and fiscal challenges, have caused many businesses to close their doors, downscale their operations or forced them to depend on Government's financial rescue packages, in order to keep them afloat.

While business entities in the retail and wholesale sectors complained of the falloff in business activities, the immediate response has been the reduction felt in the numbers of workers employed in establishments. Despite the reduction in income, many businesses have survived. Employees who once enjoyed a level of job security, suddenly found themselves on the breadline. A series of developments inclusive of introduction and embracing of new technologies in the workplace, showcased the ease with which employees within the public and private sectors could be displaced. For starters the move to digitalization, informatics and robotics have changed the workplace landscape. It would appear that traditional jobs are fast being eliminated. The demand for new skills means that there is a need for those in the current workforce to become retrained. Based on trends, it would seem that robotics will play a big part in determining the type of jobs that will be available on the job market, and the skills levels that are required of those who are fortunate to be recruited.

With the heavy promotion of online shopping, it becomes clear that this has implications for retail business establishment where over the counter purchases is the norm. As the demand for in store shopping declines, this signals that there is less need for shop assistants, sales clerks and other store related jobs. The impact of the severity of the change towards online shopping, is more likely to be felt in small economies where more attention is paid to importation rather than on manufacturing and local production. This new development signals that the time is right for a wave of new and progressive thinking. In a competitive business environment, those persons with the available financial resources ought to be

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considering investing in providing new services and in the manufacturing sectors. As progressive business persons, the thinking should be to become engaged in cooperative or joint business ventures, where there is a greater sharing of resources and risks. This is an approach that ought to be encouraged by the financial lending institutions. Heavy investments in both the services and manufacturing sectors, is more than likely to generate new job opportunities.

It is quite noticeable that the down turn in the employment sector has driven many to embark on setting up micro enterprises and to be engaged in menial work. The sustainability of micro enterprises in a highly competitive market, particularly where many are involved in vending in the sale of basically the same products, seems highly unsustainable and not beneficial to the boasting of the economy. Much has been spoken about innovation and creativity. There is the hope that more of this would come to the fore, sooner rather than later. It is to be expected that entrepreneurship would be given the support it requires if the takeoff that is anticipated, is to take root.

For this to happen, it requires that more than tokenism is offered. Government and the financial lending institution must play a more decisively part in the process. Red tape and the numerous restrictions must be removed if progress is to be made. If the intention is to remove the stumbling blocks to the ease of doing business, then the red tape that restricts access to startup finances, ought to be revisited. Further, the time is right for serious inducements to be given to entrepreneurs. This is to be done much in the same way that governments readily made financial packages available to big businesses who cried for help during the COVID 19 Pandemic; amidst the fact that some continued to declare huge profits.

As businesses worked to deliver service excellence, it cannot be said that this has been a hallmark of their operations over the last year. With the limited access to Government Offices and imposed restrictions in accessing private sector establishments, there has been a remarkable decline in service delivery. Automation has proven to be headache as telephone pre-recordings have become the new norm. Business efficiency and productivity have declined, and it would appear that the easy of doing business has now gone out of the window. Long lines and waiting times to enter a place business, shorter opening hours of commercial

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establishments, fewer staff members on duty to attend to customers, telephone calls which are not answered or returned, are amongst the new experiences to be related. This is the price the public has to pay as workers work from home. It is called 'inconvenience.'

For those who work from home, the night mare of having to experience changes to conditions of employment, this represents a new nightmare. An eight hour workday now has become that of all day duty. If a meaningful, productive and efficient business environment is to prevail in 2022, it requires that some serious reflections and actions are taken to remedy those things that will hinder the ease of doing business, productivity and efficiency, and that will offer the needed inspiration and motivation that workers required.