

The Dynamics of the New Workplace

The twenty first century workplace has been characterized by changes brought by the new technologies which have been embraced. The importance of new technologies is attached to the promotion of greater efficiency and productivity. While the value of the new technologies cannot be overstated, there remains an appreciation for the contribution of the human resource to the achievements of the enterprise. It is not easy to downplay the fact that improved customer service and employee output which is driven by the use of new Information technology skills, all combine to make a fundamental difference to the economic growth of an enterprise and its ability to compete.

It is noticeable that with the introduction of new technologies into the workplace, there has been an induced change in the demographics of the workplace. Older workers are being forced out by younger ones, as employers move to recruit young workers who are technologically savvy. Employers are tending to invest in young workers who they believe are better equipped for the demands of the labour market. This change is seemingly to the detriment of workers who are fifty years of age and over. Workers in this age category, may want to argue a case that they are being discriminated against in the recruitment process. In response, employers may defend the hiring of younger workers as a long term investment, based on the fact that they bring new knowledge, skills and competencies to the enterprise.

This shift in the employment trends is basically a vicious cycle. This is to be expected as the world transitions from one generation to another. It is not unreasonable for employers to move with the times. In a dynamic world there will always be the introduction of new technologies which will revolutionize the world. The contention remains that the skills of workers will over a period of time become outdated or obsolete. The biggest challenge for aging members of the workforce is to maintain current with the demands of the labour market. This requires that through exposure to training and retraining, that they constantly upgrade their knowledge, skills and competencies.

The problem which confronts most workers who are settled in a job, is how complacent and comfortable they become. They ride on the notion that they have a job for life. Sadly to say, this is a fundamental mistake, for employers can easily dash the employee's hope of a job for life, by making the position redundant or by engaging in a retrenchment exercise. It was once the thinking that job experience matters, and so this provided a measure of job security. It is safe to say that today's employers continue to value experience, but are nonetheless attracted to embracing younger workers who demonstrate that they are innovative and have the ability to think outside the box.

The growing uncertainties within the workplace tend to raise the level of competition amongst employees. From an employer's perspective, this in itself can be a good thing as it can induce a greater level of productivity. This positive development can however be undermined by the tensions that are created where individual employees attempt to compete with each other to gain recognition. This is where the plot can be lost for employers, who have to resort to spending inordinate time putting out fires, rather than paying critical attention to the management of the enterprise. The further downside of this is the effort it requires to get the best from employees. In short, where there is internal employee conflict, there is every likelihood that productivity will suffer.

The more extensive use of new technologies will inevitably reduce the oversize of the national workforce. This means that the fight to arrest the level of unemployment is far from over. It would appear that instead of moving to resolve this problem, modernization of the workplace driven by automation and other technologies, will only serve to compound the problem.

Ever since the first industrial revolution, the world has been forever transformed. Experts claimed that the fourth industrial revolution is upon us. The outcomes of any industrial revolution is creativity. With this being the case it can be projected that within the short to medium term, more new jobs will be created. In summary, this will drive the return to substantial levels of employment.