

Coping with Personal and Organizational Integrity

Personal integrity is characterized by such things as honour, truth and nobility. Organization integrity when compared to personal integrity is broader in scope. It is defined as a set of values and beliefs that guide the behaviours, systems and practices which an organization is required to follow in order to achieve its business goals.

The integrity of the individual and organization respectively, helps to shape the image people have of the person, the organization or enterprise. The public's view of an individual as the leader or manager, can heavily influence their interactions with the organization. It is taken for granted that every individual has a set of principles and standards which inform how they behave. Organizations and enterprises have their individual culture and since this is so, it is expected that the leaders and managers will be guided by rules, regulations, policies, practices, procedures and processes.

It is accepted that individual behaviour is guided by societal values and norms. With each individual having a mind of their own, their character is shaped by reasonable behaviour that is premised on the understanding of what is right and wrong, good and bad, acceptable and unacceptable, responsible and irresponsible, indifferent and/or malicious. Persons in public life are subject to constant scrutiny and hence their character and integrity continually comes under the microscope. Invariably, the actions of an individual can have an impact on the organization they serve. When personal accolades are given to the leadership, this raises the profile of the organization. On the flip side, the negatives only help to smear the organization.

The simple fact stands that there is no divorcing the fallout from an individual's personal integrity and that of the organization. Where in the public's eye the individual is the face of the organization, then it requires that damage control is done in order to restore trust, confidence and repair any harm to the organization's image. It would seem that integrity and credibility issues are part of the norm of everyday life which cuts across the political landscape, the labour movement, employers and civil society organizations. It is an uncontested fact that integrity cannot be legislated. Legislation can only be effective as far as it is meant to deter and punish those who are culpable. With this being the case, the pressure is placed on organizations to find ways and means of preserving the integrity of the organization.

The putting of systems in place ought to be a preferred option. A strong case can be made for establishing a Code of Conduct which addresses both principles and benchmarks. The Code of Practice should provide the framework for the conduct of members, leadership and management as it relates to transparency and respect for the values of the organization. It should promote a commitment to the fundamental principles of disclosure in conducting business lawfully, with integrity, and the showing of respect for others.

As it pertains to conducting business lawfully and with integrity, there should be the understanding that there is a no tolerance policy to any and all forms of corruption, whether it is bribery, receipts of gifts in exchange for favours, embezzlement, extortion or misappropriation. There should also be safeguards to information and property. This in essence is directed at maintaining confidentiality.

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Having established a Code of Conduct, it is left to individual trade unions to determine how best they ought to respond in addressing breaches of integrity which may arise. Should such matters be dealt with internally, rather than within the full glare of the public? Shouldn't the process of natural justice be followed and therefore satisfy the requirements of due process? If the answer to these questions is in the affirmative, then there can be no challenge mounted to the exercise of a fair, just and transparent process. It must be reiterated that any investigation should be conducted in strict confidence. If a formal procedure ensues, confidentiality appropriate to that procedure must also apply.

It is important not to have the case prejudiced in any form or fashion. Consistent with this, the disposing of the matter in a timely manner is always best, as justice delayed is justice denied.

As part of good governance, governments, trade unions, private sector employers and civil society organizations should seriously consider how they would respond when an issue of integrity engages their attention. It is clear that the failure to act in a decisive manner can send a wrong message to all and sundry. The pressures being brought to bear on the organization can be relieved, if the party in question admits to wrong doing and does the honourable thing and places his/her resignation at the disposal of the organization.