

## **Preserving Institutional Knowledge**

Every enterprise and organization should have a vested interest in preserving its institutional knowledge. This institutional knowledge specifically relates to the history of the enterprise or organization. Workplaces and corporate entities should have an interest in preserving information on policies, protocols, procedures, techniques and strategies which have been developed over time. Institutional knowledge can be best described as the knowledge of the workplace culture and its practices. All of this information may be documented and archived.

A premium is however placed on the knowledge which is stored in the memories of long-standing employees who have worked with the enterprise or organization. The personal recollections and experiences of each employee serves to provide useful information and insights on how the enterprise or organization operated in the past. Having an understanding of past trends and being able to recall previous successes and achievements can proved to be important to the continued growth and development to the institution. Institutional knowledge can therefore serve the useful purpose of providing historical information which can be used to prevent the reinventing of the wheel, and limit or prevent possible mistakes being made or repeated.

With the retrenchment of workers, and loss of long-standing employees as a result of retirement, there is the lost of institutional memory. This is a factor that appears to be lost upon employees, particularly as they engage in retrenchment or lay off programmes. Other than this, institutional memory is lost when employees change jobs or relocate to other jurisdictions. When this occurs, it can place the management of the enterprise or organization in a situation where it placed under pressure in its planning, making and execution. The absence of reference points for directional purposes can be prove to be problematic and contribute to a loss of productivity and spent energies. As is now evident in some workplaces and organizations, the absence of employees with institutional memory, has forced management to revert to offering retired employees short term contracts of employment to assist the process in getting major work done.

The policy of rehiring retired employees on short term contract can be a demotivational strategies to other workers who may consider that they are being robbed of the opportunity to be considered for promotion. What is more disconcerting about this approach, is the failure of management to address the issue of succession planning. It would appear to be short sighted if management in the interest of preserving it institutional knowledge did not undertake to stagger the retirement of employees. Along with this, it would make good sense to capture and record pertinent information at the time of completing staff performance appraisal and exits interviews. Human Resources Managers would want to engage in the practice of exit interviews, so that useful information could be had from an employee who is leaving employment with the enterprise/ organization. The trending of this approach is more than likely to be cemented in the understanding of a management of the importance attached to investing in long standing employees.

Management can address this matter of institutional knowledge by initiating ways of sharing information among all levels of staff. Indeed, staff training is always a viable option to pursued. The developing of policies and procedures protocols are equally important to the information and knowledge process. The mentorship of new employees by older employees, is a good strategy to employ in ensuring that the instructional knowledge is shared and preserved.

**Preserving Institutional Knowledge: DENNIS DE PEIZA: Labour & Employee Relations Consultant: 28 February 2020**