

Know Your Role and Functions

The presence of an organizational structure is a common feature which exists in private sector enterprises, the public sector, non-governmental, civil society organizations, trade unions, political parties, sporting and community-based organizations. The structure serves the useful purpose of defining the roles and functions at all levels of the organization. It is common place to have a structure, where at the apex is an Executive Board, Board of Directors or Board of Management. The persons who served at the level of the Board are usually elected or appointed and are charged with making policy decisions.

In every organization there is a President or Chairman. This person rightly sits at the apex of the organization and assumes responsibility for the chairmanship of meetings. The President or Chairman is charged with communicating the vision, direction and goals of the organization and ensuring that the policies and procedures are in place and are followed. It must be stressed that there is an expectation that the President or Chairman would lead the Board or Executive Committee in carrying out its governance functions. This would ensure that the Board has and follows approved policies that would help to ensure compliance in the governance and management of the organization. Basically, it is the responsibility of the President to ensure that the business of the organization is conducted properly. The President is regarded as the Principal spokesman of the organization. This individual should be mindful that this role is to be shared with the General Secretary or Secretary. In the case of trade unions, the role of the President extends beyond the chairing of meetings of the Executive Board or Council. The President is expected to attend Labour Management meetings, meetings with stakeholders and bargaining meetings.

Within the structure of every organization, provision is made for the election or appointment of an officer to manage the daily operations. This person becomes the executive of the organization and assumes responsibility for the management of the affairs of the organization. This executive officer is referred to by such names as Chief Executive Officer, Managing Director, Manager, General Manager, General Secretary and Secretary General. As a point of interest, the role of Chief Executive

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Officer, equally applies to that of a Permanent Secretary who is the chief administrative officer of a Ministry of Government.

It is to be reiterated and made clear that the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is the highest-ranking executive in an organization whose primary responsibilities include making major decisions, managing the overall operations and its resources and acting as the main point of communication between the Executive Board, Board of Directors or Board of Management. In relating this to the management of trade unions, the General Secretary is in charge of the organization. This apart, the Secretary's role is to support the Chair in ensuring the smooth functioning of the Management Committee.

The relationship between the President and General Secretary is crucial to the management of the organization, as the latter acts as an information and reference point for the Chair and other committee members. That individual has a responsibility to provide guidance and recommendations based on research, offer clarification on past practice and decisions, confirm legal requirements and provide relevant documentation. The General Secretary is also responsible for ensuring meetings are effectively organized and minuted, maintaining effective records and administration, upholding the legal requirements of governing documents, communication and correspondence. It must be stressed that the General Secretary is expected to establish effective means of communication for the organization with the members, stakeholders and the public.

It is expected that the General Secretary as manager of the office would delegate duties and assignments to members of staff where there are paid employees, and to secure the voluntary assistance of Executive or Board members and members of the union.

Problems occur when the Chairman or President goes beyond the confines of their role and function. Why is this so? One could hazard a guess that this comes about when there is the exercise of exuberance on the part of one to usurp the role of another. If this is left unchecked, it brings about discord, mistrust and division within the organization. In making a distinction between the President or Chairman and the

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Chief Executive Officer, General Manager, Manager or General Secretary, it must be made abundantly clear that President or Chairman has no executive authority, unless the organizational structure allows for an Executive Chairman or President, which then grants executive authority.

While the Chairman technically has higher level powers, the clear understanding is that the Chief Executive Officer is the boss. This is a given since the CEO answers to the Board of Directors, Board of Management or Executive Board, which is ultimately headed by a chairman or president. Based on the structure of trade unions, there are no differences in how this applies to the role of the President of the organization.