

Inclusivity in the Management of Trade Unions

Trade unions are democratic organizations that are expected to function according to democratic processes and norms which dictate their internal interaction and participation, that includes decision making. This open medium enables members to share their opinions, ideas, experiences, and to learn from each other.

There is the misconception that the leadership of trade unions is directly the responsibility of the elected President and General Secretary. If this was the case, then this would negate the role of an Executive Board, Executive Committee or Council. Trade unions are not meant to discriminate or leave anyone out. Consistent with this, the notion of the exclusion of any member in decision making process can be called into question. It is to be understood that the structure of the trade union. places ultimate decision-making responsibility in the hands of the Executive leadership.

Whereby there are levels of decision making with the trade union structure, the reality remains that the decision making commences at the level of the general membership. The membership directs or mandates the elected leadership on how to proceed. The Executive is thereafter charged with determining policies and strategies to give effect to the pursuit of the mandate. As part of the structure, it falls to the secretariat to manage the implementation process, through planning, coordinating, directing and execution. The secretariat plays a pivotal role in the advising, making recommendations and overseeing the day-to-day management of the organization. What becomes clear is the fact that there are distinct responsibilities which are charged and to be assumed by elected officials within the structure.

Problems within the structure become inherent, whereupon there is no respect for the process and the absence of teamwork. For the most part, problems sometimes come about because of the over exuberance on the part of an individual. This is where roles collide and conflicts occur. Such difficulties tend to emerge where there is no appreciation of what constitutes good governance, where disregard is given to an organization's rules, guidelines, and procedures. It becomes worse if the action of a player is unsupportive and can border on being undermined.

Uncompromising behaviour is often a reflection of a non- appreciation of what constitutes the features of democracy. These features would include freedom of assembly, association, personal property, freedom of religion and speech, citizenship, consent of the governed, voting rights, freedom from unwarranted governmental deprivation of the right to life and liberty, and minority rights. This highlights the need for the fostering of an environment where everyone feels a sense of belonging and participation.

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The subject of inclusivity has meaning where in the practice, the contributions of all are valued and respected, people are treated with respect and dignity, unfair and inappropriate barriers are eliminated; and judgements are based on equity and merit. It is to be understood that in the practice of inclusive leadership, there will always be detractors. It is for the leadership not to attempt to silence such persons but to demonstrate a willingness to listen rather than to stifle the contributions of others.

At the personal level, trade union leaders ought to be aware of the 5Cs of inclusive leadership. These are consciousness, compassion, competence and courage. It should be understood that Inclusive leadership is a leadership style that actively seeks to include the contributions and perspectives of all team members, It is to be reiterated that the practice of inclusive leadership rules out acts of discrimination, bias and any form of favoritism.