

Trade Union Governance

Trade union governance refers to systems and processes that ensure that unions operate effectively, transparently and in the members' best interests. First and foremost, trade union governance requires that they are democratic structures in place. This is for the purpose of ensuring that there is provision for elections, decision making process and procedures and for ensuring that there is accountability. Secondly, trade union governance includes the exercise of both leadership and management roles. Here-in lies the discharge of responsibilities, systems of checks and balances. Thirdly, there is financial accountability, which requires transparency in financial management, oversight and resource allocation. Fourthly, trade union governance demands that there is membership engagement, wherein there is participation in the decision-making process. Finally, trade union governance is underpinned by clearly documented policies and procedures, which serve as operational guidelines.

For all the reasons given above, trade union governance is important. Beyond these, there is the matter of sustainability. Sustainability helps trade unions to adapt and thrive long term. Most importantly, there is the matter of trust. Trade union members are required to have trust in the leadership and its action. This can all fall apart where there is no trust within the leadership itself, there is internal division and the erosion of confidence and respect.

Trade union governance involves several key players. It starts with the leadership which includes the President, General Secretary and the Executive Board or Executive Committee. These are key players in the governance of the union who assume an oversight and functional role. There is also a role to be played by the members who, through their participation by way of attending meetings, voting and general involvement in the decision-making process, ensure that there is compliance, transparency and accountability. Those who function as shop stewards and delegates, play a pivotal in representing the interest of the members. They hold the leadership accountable for its actions in meeting the requests and directives of the membership.

**Trade Union Governance: Dennis de Peiza, Labour Relations & Employment Relations Consultant,
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The pitfalls in trade union governance can therefore be summed up as a lack of transparency, poor accountability, inadequate member engagement, financial mismanagement, which becomes evident where there is a misuse or lack of oversight of funds, and where there is the presence of autocratic leadership. Autocratic leadership is dangerous, as there is the tendency for the assumption of concentration of power, attempting to dictate what is to be done by disregarding and disrespecting the decision-making process, by engaging in actions to suppress dissenting voices, and by being engaged in undermining activities.

These pitfalls in trade union governance can be mitigated where the leadership is exposed to training in key areas of communication, management, financial management and organizational behaviour. There is value to be had in organizational training as it focuses on key aspects, such as, communications, good management practices, leadership style, conflict management, motivation and engagement.

Recommended lessons for good trade union governance would include, listening to the membership, fostering inclusivity, leading with integrity, communicating effectively and planning strategically.