Crafting the Right Human Resources Policies for Your Organisation

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In many organisations human resources policies and procedures are non-existent and if they are there, they are hopelessly outdated as to be practically useless. Some companies prefer not to develop written policy statements, arguing that if they put policies in writing, the company must follow these under all circumstances, even if doing so may be harmful to the business. Unfortunately, unwritten and unstandardized policies that are in one person's head, usually the top person in the organisation, can lead to inconsistent treatment of employees and staff morale problems. Documented policies help employers chart their course and the specific practices they wish to follow. However, a poorly conceived and written manual can cause many more problems than it can potentially solve. In many instances it is better to have no policy manual at all than to have a bad one.

Some organisations argue that because they have a small staff complement or when the business is only starting, they can't afford to have human resources policies. This is fatal thinking as the organisation needs to start and grow with sound human resources policies. However it's also fatal to have policies that have just been copied from another company. Policies copied from other organisations might be incompatible with your organisation's culture and values thereby impacting negatively on business performance. However, it is rarely necessary to start from scratch. Looking at polices from other organisations to gain insight into how they have done it is helpful. Your human resources policies should be driven by the overall business needs.

Employers should be careful to review and edit all policies gathered from outside sources before using them in the manual. It is also critical to ensure that all policy statements are not in violation of the Labour Relations Act and Collective Bargaining Agreements for your sector. Many employers normally overlook this very important factor when designing their human resources policies.

When developing these, it is important to think thoroughly through the whole process. Remember there are literally hundreds of decisions to be made regarding human resources in the development of these policies. Do not use the manual to attempt to correct problems of mismanagement. Policy manuals cannot correct management problems.

What is the difference then between a human resources policy and procedures manual and a staff handbook? Human resources policies and procedures manuals and employee handbooks are different documents with different contents and objectives. A Human Resources and Procedures manual is a document that presents all the organization's policies, its procedures for implementing these policies and the different forms to be used for specific human resources transactions. This manual is usually very detailed. Human resources policies and procedures manuals are tools designed to acquaint managers and supervisors with the organization's policies and procedures and help them carry out their day-to-day

human resources responsibilities.

Any employee handbook, on the other hand, is a document that introduces employees to the organisation and familiarise them with guidelines and benefits that affect the employment relationship. Although statements of policy appear in both documents, handbook coverage is usually abbreviated. Perhaps the most important reason to create a staff handbook is to document the employer's expectations.

Employers should always try to avoid the temptation of developing one document to serve as both a staff handbook and a policies and procedures manual. A document of that nature is normally too detailed for employees and not detailed enough for managers. As a result, employees either do not read it or do not understand it, and managers do not find in it the information they need to carry out their daily responsibilities.

In developing human resources policies, it is important to use a standardized format. This will ensure consistency in the preparation and dissemination of policies and procedures. This procedure also helps the organisation to come up with a document that has a professional appearance and this will lend credibility to the manual.

It is always advisable to have a Policy Committee that will oversee and help in the preparation of human resources policies. Setting up a committee of this nature is important even in situations where you are using an outside consultant. The committee should be made up of people from a cross section of divisions and departments, depending on the size of the organisation. Where possible, committee members should have a fair understanding of where the business is going and sound working knowledge of all the divisions or departments. The committee should be small enough to be functional yet large enough to ensure that it has expertise concerning all aspects of the company.

A number of human resources practitioners believe that because they are the experts in policy development, they alone should establish company policies. They need to remember that policies are applicable to the whole organisation hence the need for them to be relevant to all departments and divisions. It is important to point out that the policy document expresses the philosophy of the organisation, not the philosophy of the human resources department. During the policy development phase, the committee needs to gather information from different sources within the organisation. After developing human resources policies and procedures, there is need to constantly review and update them, as your business needs changes. This also helps in ensuring that the policies remain viable from both a legal and employee -relation's standpoint.

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