

The people management landscape for 2021



By Jonathan Goldberg

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Covid-19 has forced most companies to step back and re-think their organisational design and remuneration. The shift into remote work, the need to manage output - and not hours - as well as the financial pressure placed on companies to meet salary and benefits obligations, has created the opportunity to review age-old norms. For many, a forced review of costs has led to discussions about how work is performed and whether it cannot be structured differently to meet the growing demands for flexibility, remote working, and individualised remuneration structures. And costs reduction efforts don't have to mean employers win, and employees lose.



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As an illustration, what the coronavirus has brought to the fore is the relationship between companies and trade unions. Within this relationship, a new approach needs to be taken. Trade unions and companies should be working together as partners – and being as transparent as opposed to the current, often confrontational, relationship which they currently have. This new approach should put employees and the company's needs at the forefront of all negotiations.

There is not time left for old-style engagements. Multiple jobs have and will be lost unless parties understand the local and global pressures that they are facing in order to remain competitive. Bad practices and waste need to be eliminated immediately or the jobs will continue to be lost. Open communication with all employees is essential for information to be known consistently, not only at the time of retrenchments and wage negotiations.

Maximising the full potential of employees

Apart from forced migration to online learning and online facilitation (which are two different things) as a result of the lockdown period, there is now a keener interest from business to know the full potential of its employees.

As a result, we've seen several employers looking at the drafting and/or updating their employee skills matrix. Many organisations have implemented leaner employee structures and knowing what their employees may be able to do/contribute - in addition to what they are already doing - may be of great advantage.

In 2021 and beyond, there will probably be a move back to organisations instilling a learning culture among their employees. The most important features of a learning culture are:

- Employee engagement
- Sound technology framework because as technology is all-pervasive, we must consider learning technologies which incorporate learning, the sharing of knowledge, successes and insights
- Corporate culture and a physical space which allows for building knowledge, sharing knowledge as well as re-building knowledge

It's no longer about doing a lot of training but rather about conducting focused, outcomes-based learning, which can be transferred or shared in the workplace and that is relevant to the overall competitiveness of the organisation.

Re-energising the Employment Equity consultation process

Employment Equity (EE) consultation processes need to become more constructive and consultative. At the moment, EE committees are stagnant and are not very pro-active.

When the analysis is conducted before preparing the EE plan, most of the EE committee members are just present with the facilitator and HR doing all the talking. Also, there is very limited consultation and communication between the EE committee and employees.

By recording a short awareness video (which can be topical and based on, for example, sexual harassment, bullying, disability or HIV/Aids), which employees can watch in their own time and, following this, participate in a short, anonymous online questionnaire that is specific to the topic of the video, management will have more insight into the views of shopfloor workers. Thus, the committee will have actual employee comments to work on.

Finally, the effectiveness of the committee needs to be measured in the same way as the rest of the organisation.

A win-win situation

As businesses seek to reduce costs through lowering salaries, adopting less onerous fixed benefits packages, and saving on overheads associated with large office spaces, some of these changes can be made attractive to employees. Greater flexibility and opportunities to work remotely, resulting in less time wasted in traffic and costs associated with travel and childcare, could balance out more flexible packages. Shifts to total cost remuneration would help to manage employment costs for employers and provide individuals with the chance to structure their income to meet their unique – and changing – needs.

Of course, businesses – and individual employees as well as their managers – will all need assistance in adapting to, and especially in managing, asynchronous work hours, performance management and structural changes. We remain positive that, as we enter 2021, more of us will begin to accept that work is something you do, not somewhere you go and that

performance should be measured on output and not hours chained to a desk.

ABOUT JONATHAN GOLDBERG

Jonathan Goldberg is a leading voice in space Labour Law and Employee Relations. As the joint-CEO of Global Business Solutions, Jonathan has made the company into the foremost labour law, human resources and industrial relations consultancy.

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