

Getting People Back to Work

Events such as natural disasters and other catastrophes can often result in the displacement of workers. This occurs as a consequence of the impact these can have on the operations of business. It is not unusual for employers to lay the blame for any layoffs or the retrenchment of employees on a forced closure or reduction in the volume of business activity. In almost every case where labour has been displaced, employees have been placed on short term hours of work or engaged on flexible work arrangements. Employees tend to cite a financial downturn in business, as the basic reason for their actions.

For whatever reason the issue of labour cost emerges as a critical factor, this is an important determinant regarding the viability and survival of an enterprise. Very often the decision seems not to address the matter of the redistribution of personnel but more so, focusses on cost effectiveness and the maintaining of profit. Employers who opt to close the doors of their business opt to scale down their operations ought not to be insensitive to the emotional stress that employees will undergo. It would be unreasonable not to assume that employers will face the pressures of the stress and trauma associated with the making of a decision which has implications for safeguarding of their investment.

From an employees' perspective, there is the expectation that any decision which an employer will make on the future of the business, would take into consideration the welfare and well being of the employees. This is where there is a sense of proactive and strategic thinking being exercised by the employer. Effecting a crisis management plan is one way of mitigating the fall out if and when a business finds itself forced to respond in a dire situation. When facing a crisis situation, the employer has the option to restructure the business or to merge with another entity. These are two of the common practices which are followed.

Employees who are displaced from work have the frustration of having to reorganize their lives. They have the arduous task of finding new and suitable employment. Some might face the challenge of not finding suitable employment because they lack skills which the labour market currently demands.

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The difficulty of finding suitable employment can result in many being underemployed and unfortunately reduced to poverty. Displaced workers who find a new job and who might be reengaged are likely to find that they are subjected to new terms and conditions of service. For the most part, there is no job security, reduced wages and salaries are paid, employment is either temporary, part-time, or on a fixed term agreement, over time pay does not apply and the demands of the job can sometimes be very high.

The issue of competition for jobs is a stark reality for displaced workers. Those classified as white-collar workers and those who occupied jobs in the corporate world in positions of management and as top executives, in sectors such as banking, finance, tourism, manufacturing industry and commerce are all included in the list of workers to be impacted. In the global market place, they face a challenge from immigrant labour. The competition is fiercer at the lower levels, and employers are prone to engage immigrant labour who tend to show a willingness to accept reduced pay and sometimes substandard working conditions.

The number of displaced workers in the labour market has contributed to the upscaling of the number of persons engaging in seasonal employment. While this helps to ease the level of economic pain and suffering displaced workers endure, it does not erase the social fallout which results from reduced income levels, and the fact that there is not sustained employment.

There is a school of thought that as displaced workers attempt to address the situation which has befallen them, employment in construction and agriculture are avenues in which they can be absorbed. Added to this, there is the view that a pathway or gateway to new opportunities can be found within the realm of entrepreneurship. There is a perception that countless job opportunities are available in these sectors but even if this was so, it requires that investment is made to develop initiatives that would lead to job creation.

Much has been made of training and retraining as a means to an end of reabsorbing displaced workers into the workforce. The resort to training is to support new technologies in the workplace, and to also to embrace vocational training and entrepreneurship. Training therefore seems as an ideal solution as a means of getting

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back to work but where as this is so, there must be jobs available to those who are ready for work. If this is to bear fruit, then it means that the private sector must have jobs on offer to the many unemployed persons. Invariably, it means that the private sector must look to generate new business initiatives in the short and medium term. Contingent on this, governments must play their part in helping to facilitate the development of growth of new business initiatives.