

Counter Productive Strategies

At a time when economies of both the industrialized countries of the world and Small Island developing states are wheeling under the prevailing economic pressures, it would seem that the policy makers are required to desperately find solutions to address the social and economic decline that now characterized our societies. As elected political officials, politicians for some unknown reason believe that they are principally charged with the responsibility of finding solutions to what is a global and national problem. It may be that politicians are made to feel this way simply because they view that the electorate has absconded its responsibility and placed it in their hands as a trusted few.

If it is accepted that participatory democracy is the practiced in western societies, then politicians should never be left to feel that the voice of the people is not important in the decision making process. Since our societies do not encourage, promote or practice any form of dictatorship, it would be expected that consultation and dialogue would be a feature of governance all at levels. The absence of this means that a divide has been created in our governance systems; which manifests itself at the level of management in ministries, departments and agencies within the public service and at the enterprise level in the private sector.

The participation of persons in any decision making is a positive feature of the management. Nothing can be more divisive and unproductive, than to create an environment which promotes exclusion over inclusion. There are several reasons why this occurs, but it can be generally advanced that it emerges from the big stick policy approach that permeates the walls of management in the workplace and governments who lead at the national level. It is a growing problem that serves no useful purpose other than to discourage and demotivate persons, and further, contribute to declining levels of productivity.

Take the instance where worker engagement and empowerment are not seemingly part of the agenda of management, but yet these workers are subject to demands of the highest order from management. This creates tensions where demands are pressed by trade unions on the behalf of unionized workers. Down time or loss of man hours, attitudes and dispositions of employees, and workplace hostility, commitment and loyalty, all become issues that translate in a

decline in worker productivity. It makes good sense for management in both the public sector and private enterprise not to ignore or be reluctant to engage the trade union that represents workers in the workplace. If it is a case of management not sharing the view that by working with the workers' representative body, it is doing so to advance the interest of both workers and the enterprise, then sadly management has missed the boat.

It would make a whole lot of sense if government as the largest and model employer was to ensure that standards and best management practices are observed in the public sector, and establishes mechanisms to ensure that there is compliance within the private sector. While this is ideal, for this to work it requires greater policing of the system. In cases where there is provision for justice to be served, such as an employee(s) being unfairly treated, it is the delay in the meeting out of justice that can run contrary to productivity. Fellow employees are unlikely to give of their best, should they feel a threat of termination, layoff or retrenchment hanging over their heads. Fewer employees can be expected to go the extra mile where there is no security of tenure to be had, but left to work under a contract of employment, and/or where there is few or no opportunity for promotion. Those who are given reduced hours of work, receive minimum social security benefits and are not incentivized in any form or fashion, will not be as committed and productive as expected.

It is to be expected that societies which value and respect workers would promote employer – employee engagement as a fundamental to good workplace relations. This is unlikely to happen if government as the model employer can be accused of not setting the example.