The Reshaping of the traditional World of Work

As the world discusses the future of work, this gives cause to reflect on the enforced employment changes that are expected to take root. It has already been established that much of the change will be driven by the need to bring about a reduction in operation expenditure at the enterprise level. It has been identified that efficiency and productivity are the means of achieving the end result. However, it has been recognized that in moving to achieve this, the effort must be tied to a reduction of the workforce through a programme of rationalization and the introduction of new technologies in the workplace.

This global phenomenon is meant to reorganize the way business is done and develop a new workplace culture. The traditional workplace was characterized by an investment in human resource. The introduction of varying forms of technologies and artificial intelligence, are now well positioned to bring about a radical transformation to the traditional workplace. Moreover, these are dominant factors which are helping to reshape the demands of today's labour market.

With the increasing presence of automation and virtual technologies in the workplace, this tends to signal the replacement of a number of individuals who are required to occupy an operating space, for the purpose of completing varying tasks. The coming into play of automation, artificial intelligence and virtual technologies basically contribute to remote working. This necessitates a demand for a new form of labour, and therefore displaced workers through retooling can make themselves ready for reabsorption into the workforce.

The problem which many will face is the time it will take before they acquire the requisite skills and competencies that make them eligible for recruitment and hiring, as being well prepared in order to make themselves marketable. Younger persons already in the workforce and those who are entering the job market for the first time, will more than likely have a distinct advantage over their aged counterpart. With the writing virtually on the wall, trade unions would have missed the boat, if as part of their collective bargaining agreements there was not an insistence on the training and retraining of employees.

Some would argue that trade unions should have seen this development coming, where technologies would have made an impact on the retention of labour, which by extension held implications for the sustaining of trade union density. In their attempt to ensure that they maintained their relevance and importance, trade unions should have taken the initiative in driving training programmes that are intended to promote the interest and welfare of their members. Though somewhat late, trade unions must still work to find ways of building collaborative relationships /partnerships that will help them to achieve this end.

In reflecting on the downside for labour in a world driven by new technologies, the positive is that the change brings about the movement of workers from a controlled work environment and a fixed 8-12 hour working day. This offers workers the opportunity to become free lanced workers, who are removed from the demands and rigidities of the workplace, which can potentially lead to severe stress. Workers are no longer subject to long hours of work, tight deadlines, and constant meetings which take up many hours and a heavy workload, just to name a few.

From the perspective of labour, there a number of other positives that can be identified. As free launchers, entrepreneurs or members of the informal economy, they now have flexible working hours, are not subjected to a rigid system of supervision and accountability, are able to make independent decisions, take their initiative and hopefully be innovative. As an outcome of all this, there is the expectation that workers will become more productive, be self-motivated, and have a better work-life balance. It is imperative that workers manage the change process in ways that continue to ensure that the human resource cannot be eliminated or made irrelevant.