
Employer Concerns – 1. Lack of Time

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When we ask Employers about the main challenges they encounter managing people; they often refer to a 'lack of time'. Specifically; not enough time to:

- Thoroughly interview candidates. Many Employers feel that taking the time to interview a second time or establish an interview panel would increase the likelihood of a successful hire. The reality is though that many recruitment decisions are made in haste
- Check out the candidates' credentials such as references and qualifications. Missing out on this important stage increases risk for the business
- Clarify performance expectations at the outset. Failure to do this reduces the likelihood of a successful probation
- Manage performance on an ongoing basis. Not having the time to do this means that valuable feedback and development opportunities are missed and also employees' efforts may not be focused on business priorities
- Maintain up to date employee records from which insightful reports on areas such as absenteeism and payroll costs can be generated
- Deal effectively with employee relations matters otherwise they can spiral out of control very quickly
- Manage the leaver process in a professional way, otherwise Employers may miss out on the opportunity to gain feedback from the leaver about their experience and to close off on any outstanding matters.

Our studies have shown that a business with 50 employees will spend in excess of 1,250 hours in a year on people management activities. This is an average figure and does not allow for exceptional activities such as major recruitment campaigns, downsizing programmes, complex grievance and disciplinary management. When provisions are made for such matters, the total is likely to be closer to 1,500 hours. It is important to consider the opportunity cost of this time, ie... this is 1,500 hours not being spent on some other critical area of the business. Yet for many Employers they still feel this is not enough time; that they are not effectively addressing core employment matters

Unfortunately there is no easy way to manage the problem; time simply cannot be manufactured. However we recommend four simply steps to help you save time in how you manage HR...

1. 'A stitch in time saves nine'.

Failure to spend the time at the outset results in considerable levels of fire-fighting later on. For example, a rushed recruitment process is very likely to result in a dis-satisfied employer and/or a dis-satisfied manager and perhaps a dis-satisfied candidate. One way or another, action has to be taken to rectify the situation. If the employee leaves or moves within your organisation, they will have to be replaced. This demands even more of your time. If they remain, time will need to be spent managing the 'dis-satisfaction'. For example a series of meetings may be required to clarify performance expectations and provide supports to the employee.

2. Pursue clarity

It may sound simple but taking the time to set out clear parameters regarding the employment relationship is vital. In other words, a clearly defined job description for each employee, a contract of employment which outlines terms and conditions of employment, a concise set of performance objectives and measures of success should be agreed early on. Although this sounds like more work, establishing these fundamentals at the outset saves time later on. We firmly believe that every matter which is left floating 'up in the air' will eventually have to be grounded!

3. Tackle issues early

Many employers are only too keen to 'let sleeping dogs lie' when it comes to employee relations matters. It is important that structures are put in place to allow employees to raise issues; for example through staff meetings, suggestion schemes and intranets. It is equally important that the issues are listened to and addressed. Where there is no forum or where issues raised are not tackled early on they can gather momentum very quickly. When this happens a considerable amount of management time will be required to diffuse.

4. Work with external providers

It is important to consider the amount of time you are spending on HR activities and administration and how this time is being allocated. Is your business spending the time on high leverage activities such as resource planning, performance management, coaching, staff development, and management development? Or is the time being spent on administration, documentation, management of leave records, contracts and policy updates, payroll and employee relations handling?

If your business is spending a lot of time on the latter category, it is at the expense of the first and it is also at the expense of your core business activities. It is important to consider if any of the activities can be outsourced to an external provider. The area of outsourcing is discussed in detail

in this edition. In a nutshell though it involves the delegation of one or more of your HR processes to an external provider, who then manages and administers these based on defined service level agreements. For example payroll, management of benefits, recruitment and selection and training are often outsourced activities.

Another way of saving time is the implementation of HR technology. Companies are now implementing web-based systems which enable employees and managers to undertake a number of HR-related activities themselves via a portal or intranet. For example, employees can update their own personal details when their circumstances change, and managers can review absence records for all their staff. Typically, in an business it takes five transactions and 35 mins. to approve a holiday request; the employee completes a form and emails/drops down to their manager (10 mins), manager checks team diary and employee's holidays balance and approves (10 minutes), manager advises employee that request is approved (5 mins) and advises the payroll department/HR administrator that the balance is approved (5 mins) and the payroll department/HR administrator updates the balance (5 mins). If the employee has access to a self service HR system, they can request and receive online approval from their manager. When the request is approved the holiday database is automatically updated. This will take about 5 minutes in total. For a business with 75 employees the total time saving is considerable!

**For further information on this article or any HR matter,
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