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Responsible management of work: Values needed post-COVID



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Barriers to talent acquisition, like geography, distance and time that previously existed have been broken down by the new work models

For many managers and leaders, the pandemic brought several realisations: First, that traditional ways of managing will no longer apply in the future of work.

Second, that work, in essence, is a partnership and not rulership, and third, to ensure responsible management, certain values will become indispensable in the future of work. This third realisation is the crux of this article. What values will become sine qua non for responsible management post-COVID and in the future of work?

This question was the focus of discussion at the CKCRLE webinar organised by the Christopher Kolade Centre for Research in Leadership and Ethics (CKCRLE). The speakers, who had cumulatively over 100 years of experience in the private sector and public sector were members of the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) class at the Lagos Business School.

Transformation and disruptions are a part of economic life and business and have previously manifested in the form of economic downturns, inflations, market crashes, war, etc.

The COVID-19 pandemic is similar to these hitherto disruptions in the sense that it caused a shift in the way of doing things, perhaps significantly more so. It accelerated the digital transformation of most (if not all) organisations, as organisations were compelled to transfer their processes online.

It also propelled scholarship on responsible work and management, as the new work models empowered both employees and their employers. Now more than ever, employees and employers have far greater choices when it comes to employment.

Barriers to talent acquisition, like geography, distance and time that previously existed have been broken down by the new work models. As employers are faced with the challenge of employee retention, so are employees faced with the challenge of AI induced redundancy.

Scholars assert that in the future of work, certain values will be necessary for organisations to thrive and perform effectively. However, before we go into these values, it will benefit readers to have a grasp of what we mean by responsible management of work.

Responsible Management of Work

Management of work simply means how we get things done in a work environment. How we get things done efficiently and effectively. How we get things done in a way that ensures alignment with organisational goals.

Responsible management on the other hand means how we get things done in a way that is not only efficient and effective but also sustainable and ethical. These three components are considered the pillars of responsible management: Efficiency; Sustainability; and Ethical Conduct.

To be efficient means you are maximising resources in the best way possible and reducing waste as much as you can. Whether it be wastage of human resources, wastage of time, or wastage of material resources.

To be sustainable entails making sure continuity is assured. Paying attention to the triple bottom line, that is, people, planet and profit. People form the human resource of an organisation and are key in any organisation.

Ensuring that the human resource thrives is essential for the growth and continuity of the organisation. The planet is where our business operates and also provides for our sustenance (the food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe), thus it is critical we protect the planet while conducting our business. And finally ensuring the business is profitable.

The third pillar of responsible management emphasizes organisations acting in a morally sound way. Leaders and managers have the responsibility of driving organisational culture, as such the bulk of this pillar objective falls on them.

Research has shown that when leaders act ethically, employees are more likely to do the same. Scholars also assert that ethical values create a strong culture of trust in an organisation.

Values needed post-COVID

Many of the new work models that now exist and will come to exist will require significant trust and loyalty from both the employer and the employee. Take, for instance, the work from home (WFH) model.

The employer must trust that the employee will perform his/her role while at home. Similarly, the onus of loyalty falls on the employee. Being loyal enough to

1. Do the work whilst without physical supervision,
2. Not disclose company information to third parties and
3. Work sincerely towards organisational growth and development.