



## Human Resources Notes

*"The aim of Human Resources Notes is to provide concise information on topical human resource management issues to guide effective people management practices."*  
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### HR can learn from sport

The world's top sports people achieve ever faster, higher, stronger levels of performance. At this level, only the best techniques and methods will produce awe inspiring performance outcomes. Managers aiming to coax top performances out of employees can look to sports codes for guidance. If they manage performance like sports teams; apply training principles adopted by top coaches and embrace technology, they may produce gold medal quality business performances. Consider these three cases.

#### 1. Performance management – F1 pit stop teams

Behind the success of world champion drivers, there are many teams of people who work together to achieve success for a Formula 1 racing team. A pit stop team is one such vital cog in the quest for victory. There is fierce rivalry between teams to record the fastest pit stops.<sup>1</sup> Three elements of performance management are crucial in the results achieved.

- (i) Clear goals: Members in a pit stop team have a clear understanding of what they are expected to achieve. "The modern pit stop is as intricate

as any ballet. Upwards of 20 individuals working in well-practiced harmony, a top team changing four wheels, adjusting a front wing, cleaning a rear wing and perhaps scrubbing a visor and clearing radiators in under three seconds or, on a *really* good day, under two..."<sup>2</sup> (Interestingly, during a Grand Prix the goal of consistency trumps speed.)

- (ii) Immediate feedback. Track side systems deliver immediate and accurate feedback on how the team has done. Implementation in 2016 of identical, calibrated high-speed cameras focussed on each pit box ensures that benchmarking against other teams is based on precise comparable data.
- (iii) Purpose. Nobody joins a pit stop team because they could not find a regular job. All members are highly motivated and driven to get the best results through continuous improvement and marginal gains. Despite the high-tech environment, F1 rules limit automation of pit stops and efficiency achieved remains firmly in the hands of the crew performing them.

These are not the only contributors to top performance: selection, planning, training, ergonomics, leadership and practice are no less important. Notably, there are no records available of F1 teams adding an annual appraisal with 5-point rating scales for pit stop team members to enhance their performance or to make other key decisions about their careers.<sup>3</sup>

#### 2. Training – Wayde van Niekerk, sprinter

South African sprinter, Wayde van Niekerk, is the current Olympic 400m sprint gold medallist and holds the 400m and 300m world records. He did not reach these heights only because he is a 'natural'. He got there and sustains his class through hours upon hours of dedicated training. Readily accessible records about top sports achievers show that they share a commitment to high intensity training.

Mohammed Ali said, “The fight is won or lost far away from the witnesses – behind the lines, in the gym and out there on the road, long before I dance under those lights.”

Wayde van Niekerk trains 3 times per day, six days per week. His training programme consists of mornings in the gym, afternoons on the track, and maintenance work such as Pilates in the evenings.<sup>4</sup> Quantity and quality are both covered.

What are some implications for the less onerous demands of ‘normal jobs in normal careers’?

- (i) Training must be needs based. When someone attends training at the company’s expense, there must be a specific outcome that is going to be achieved. Managers must understand the competencies needed for top performance and invest in training which will develop those competencies.
- (ii) Assessment and feedback must accompany training. Coaches correct athletes as they practice, tweaking technique for continuous improvement. Then there is post event analysis where video footage and other data sources are studied for insights and to track performance levels. Much of the available business training assesses performance during the training. Impact will only be assured if there is post training behaviour assessment as well.
- (iii) Training must be tied to aspirational goals. For the Olympic athlete it is the pursuit of medal placing. In the work context, employees should have clearly defined career goals as their target.

### 3. Embrace technology – Oracle America’s Cup team.

The America’s Cup, a series of sailing races held every four years, is the world’s oldest sporting event having started in 1851. This old sport has embraced the latest in hardware (yachts and computers) and software technology to achieve some of the most phenomenal performances in sport. The yachts lift out of the water on hydrofoils and fly along reaching incredible speeds of over 60mph (96kmh). New Zealand won the 2017 event.

The American entry (2013 winner and 2017 second place) is sponsored by tech-giant Oracle. The software support available to the team is mindboggling. The team collects real-time data from hundreds of sensors on the yachts and on the sailors. After each outing on the water, gigabytes of information are analysed to optimise sailing performance.

In the human resources field, there is a burgeoning amount of software available to support every conceivable HR process. A current trend is towards tools for workforce productivity which, through a team and network focus help individuals get work done in a healthy and productive way.<sup>6</sup> Technology is a massive enabler in pursuit of the perennial business challenge of getting more done with less.

To remain competitive and significant in their markets, businesses must continuously strive to stay ahead of other players in their industry. That principle is the essence of top sports performance, and businesses are well advised to examine the lessons emerging from sport. Sports are adept at using the best available science and methods to win. Businesses should be too. ■

#### References:

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- (2) Ibid.
- (3) A detailed article by the Williams F1 team’s human performance specialist (see <http://www.wired.co.uk/article/f1-pit-stop-times-record-williams>) makes no mention of performance appraisals.
- (4) Benedict, S (2017) How to train like an Olympic sprinter Men’s Fitness [Online] Available at: <https://www.mensfitness.com/training/endurance/train-like-an-olympic-sprinter> Accessed 10 February 2018
- (5) Oracle website, Available at <https://www.oracle.com/corporate/oracle-team-usa/index.html> Accessed on 10 February 2018
- (6) Bersin, J (2017) HR Technology Disruptions for 2018. *Deloitte Development LLC* [Online] Available at: <http://marketing.bersin.com/rs/976-LMP-699/images/HRTechDisruptions2018-Report-100517.pdf> Accessed 10 February 2018

## Microaggressions towards women at work

Besides the prevalence of overt sexual harassment in workplaces around the world, women also face more subtle hostility in the form of 'microaggressions' which stand as a barrier to diversity.

The term 'racial microaggressions' was coined by American psychologist Chester Pierce in the 1970s and subsequently Mary Rowe widened the scope to include similar aggressions towards women. Microaggressions in the gender context are behaviours by men which undermine women.<sup>1</sup>

Research shows that casual sexism and microaggressions have as strong an effect on organisation culture and mental health as more overt forms of harassment. It is easy to dismiss them, and easy to accuse someone who acts offended as being too "sensitive".<sup>2</sup>

The following scenarios are examples of microaggressions:

- "What are you ladies gossiping about?" – said to two or more women having a conversation.
- "You're taking notes, right?" – a question by a man to the only woman in a meeting.
- "Hi, I'm looking for the manager." – addressed to a female manager.
- "You're being dramatic. You're overreacting." – a manipulative way to undermine a woman's view.<sup>3</sup>
- When women behave assertively, particularly in the workplace, they are called bitchy, shrill, aggressive, or pushy, while men who behave in these same manners are viewed as competent leaders.
- Frequent interruptions of women when they speak.
- 'Mansplaining' or explaining something to a woman that she already knows. Mansplaining reminds women that their knowledge and expertise is considered less valuable than men's.
- Gender stereotypes have become normal and supposedly funny topics of conversation. People

laugh about how women nag their significant others or can't drive as if it's all in good fun, when really, it perpetuates beliefs used as evidence for women inferiority.<sup>4</sup>

These microaggressions share a common thread of being everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their gender, race or membership of another marginalised group.<sup>5</sup>

No organisation's programme to eliminate unfair discrimination and promote diversity can be complete without a clear policy stance against microaggressions. Such a position can be reinforced through:

- ~ Behaviour modelling by the organisation's leadership;
- ~ Diversity training during induction and through the employment lifecycle;
- ~ Offering marginalised groups access to mentoring and coaching to deal with microaggressions;
- ~ Use of pulse surveys and other information gathering techniques to continuously listen to employees' experience of work; and
- ~ Analysis of reasons for avoidable staff turnover.

A research study in the USA<sup>6</sup> concluded that a lack of emotional safety at work would make six out of ten employees quit a job immediately. Microaggressions go to the heart of safety at work. ■

### References:

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## Getting value from HR metrics

Three insights from an article<sup>1</sup> about using HR metrics strategically:

1. The intelligence that you gain from HR metrics will only be as good as the data used. Check that “best available” does not equate to “least worst available”. Data collected should meet the CARE criteria: (i) Consistent, (ii) Accurate, (iii) Reliable, and (iv) Efficient (low cost accessibility).
2. Metrics alone are almost meaningless. Two dimensions must be added. (i) *The Context*. For example, if the metric is staff turnover, then how does the current number compare with the previous period? Compare to industry benchmarks? What is the trend? What is the implication for business improvement? (ii) *The reason*. Why is the metric what it is? It may be necessary to ask “why” up to five times to get a meaningful understanding of the metric.
3. A “metric map” focuses HR metrics on relevant business challenges: (i) Understand the business strategy, (ii) Tie the business strategy to the HR strategy, (iii) Ask the critical human capital questions, and (iv) Determine the measurements that will help you address the issues at hand. ■

### Reference:

1. Feffer, M (2017) 9 Tips for using HR metrics strategically *SHRM* [online] <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/1017/Pages/9-tips-for-using-hr-metrics-strategically.aspx>. Accessed 23 February 2018

## Procedural fairness in a disciplinary hearing

Important elements of a fair procedure in a pre-dismissal disciplinary enquiry are:

### 1. The disciplinary enquiry must be held without unnecessary delay

Management should start disciplinary proceedings as soon as reasonably possible after it has come to management’s attention that misconduct has been committed. If a delay by management in taking disciplinary action unfairly harms the employee, then disciplinary action will be procedurally unfair.

### 2. The employee must be given written notification of the disciplinary hearing

Managers should use a standard notification form for this purpose. The manager issuing the notification should make sure the employee knows and understands her rights as specified on the notification form and must give the employee enough detail of the misconduct allegations to allow the employee a proper opportunity to prepare.

The Code of Good Practice for Dismissal (a schedule to the Labour Relations Act) provides that an employer should not institute discipline against a trade union representative (shop steward) or office bearer without first informing and consulting the trade union.

### 3. The employee must be given adequate time to prepare for the disciplinary hearing

Although the law does not specify what enough time is, the notice period for serious misconduct should, as a rule of thumb, be at least two working days.

### 4. The employee is entitled to be present and participate in the disciplinary hearing

This right is waived if the employee refuses or chooses not to attend the disciplinary hearing.

**5. The employee is entitled to be represented at a disciplinary hearing by a fellow employee**

The right to representation does not extend to union officials, attorneys or other non-employees.

**6. The employee may request an interpreter**

In short, the employee must be able to understand and actively participate in the proceedings.

**7. The employee is entitled to call his own witnesses and cross-question witnesses called by the employer**

A witness must have personal information relevant to the misconduct concerned.

**8. The disciplinary hearing chairperson must not be biased**

- The chairperson should not be the complainant or a witness in the case.
- The chairperson should not have a history of conflict with the employee concerned.
- The chairperson should conduct the hearing in a manner free of bias. For example, she should not conduct the hearing in a domineering or high-handed way.
- The chairperson should not prejudge the case and make up her own mind on the matter.

**9. If found to have committed the misconduct, the employee must be informed of the reasons why**

**10. Mitigation must be considered before imposing a disciplinary measure**

Mitigating factors are those that may cause the chairperson to impose a less harsh disciplinary measure, such as long service and clean disciplinary record.

**11. The employee must be advised in writing of a disciplinary measure**

Most employers have a standard form for this purpose.

**12. The employee must be advised of his right to appeal or statutory recourse**

When a company's disciplinary procedure requires it, a disciplined employee has the right to appeal against the outcome. The chairperson must advise her of that right. Where such a right is not provided for, the chairperson must advise the employee of her statutory recourse. ■

The contents of Human Resources Notes do not constitute legal advice. For specific professional assistance tailored to your needs consult an expert.



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