



Designing HR Policies & Procedures

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The world is filled with policy makers. We have plenty of policies established across the world in almost every area we can think of. Just like societies need laws to create order and common understandings, organisations need policies. Often, when businesses start small, they leave things loose and create rules as they go. However, there comes a point when an organisation needs to coordinate among its members and provide itself with legal protection. With human nature being what it is, employees will test limits and act “creatively” in workplace situations, so you need a strategy for developing, communicating and enforcing a set of policies and practices that comply with legislation and reflect your standards of acceptable behavior.

Most times we confuse policies and procedures as the same thing but there is a distinct difference between the two. A policy is a predetermined course of action, which is established to provide a guide toward accepted business strategies and objectives.

In other words, it is a direct link between an organization’s ‘Vision’ and their day-to-day operations. Policies identify the key activities and provide a general strategy to decision-makers on how to handle issues as they arise. This is accomplished by providing the reader with limits and a choice of alternatives that can be used to guide their decision-making process as they attempt to overcome problems.

Why are policies important?

Policies serve several important functions:

1. Communicate values and expectations for how things are done at your organisation.
2. Keep the organisation in compliance with legislation and provide protection against employment claims.
3. Document and implement best practices appropriate to the organisation.
4. Support consistent treatment of staff, fairness and transparency.
5. Help management to make decisions that are consistent, uniform and predictable to support business strategy.

On the other hand, procedures are specific ways of accomplishing goals. They create a platform for the implementation of the consistency required to

reduce differences in processes. As a result, procedural control is enhanced. Procedures are comprised of steps that must be followed in a consistent manner. Procedural steps are often followed in a repetitive or cyclical manner in order to achieve the intended result. A great example of a tool which can be designed by or for companies for their employees is a handbook/manual. In this document, employers should compile most of their policies and procedures for the effective running of the organisation. This can be a deliverable from the Human Resources department. However, should your company not have a Human Resource department or a person who functions as the Human Resource Officer or an outsourced HR service provider such as the BEC.

Reasons to have an Employee Handbook:

- It brings uniformity across your company. It explains expectations for everyone and mentions the consequences of violating these rules. By explaining workplace ethics and expected behaviour with colleagues and the management, an employee handbook minimises workplace disputes.
- It saves time on your personnel or administration team. Documented rules and procedures in the handbook save your managers time from explaining the same policies over to new employees joining and to others.
- It helps new employees to set their expectations from the company in terms of work schedules, leave, compensation and benefits, dress code,
- performance reviews, salary and pay revisions, holidays, training, termination policies, and more.
- It is a guidebook for your Human Resource team and a reference manual for your managers.
- It reduces the start-up time of your new employees by giving them clarity on their job responsibilities by including details on the company's expectations from them. It also conveys performance parameters and ways of acknowledgement of their good performance.

- By giving information on your company's policies on use of personal gadgets and devices within the premises, the employee handbook must include the terms and conditions for use of these equipments and the fallout from non-compliance of these rules. It helps your business in complying with employment laws and can be a beneficial legal defense against an employee lawsuit.
- It helps your company come forward with its stand on issues like favouritism, discrimination, harassment and provides information on how to report any violations regarding such issues.

Precautions to be taken while preparing your Employee Handbook:

- It should be straight-forward and in simple language. Avoid legal jargon that will confuse your employees.
- It should be regularly updated, especially because legislation is periodically reviewed and updated if necessary.
- Do not include policies and procedures that your company does not adhere to.

In retrospect, it is difficult to identify a comprehensive list of HR policies that employers should introduce other than those policies needed to comply with legislation, HR policy needs often vary widely between organisations. Policies must be crystal clear and articulated with precision leaving no room for doubt. Spelling out the course of action clearly and concisely will ensure fair treatment for all employees. A consistent policy document is crucial in saving time and avoiding administrative overload, providing easy access to all employees is of utmost importance. While developing policies is essential, regularly monitoring and inducing amendments is equally imperative. Legislative changes can make certain policies obsolete and changing needs of the employee population can make existing policies ineffective at the workplace in the long term. HR policies pave the way for a standard that will be applicable throughout an organization. It is therefore a must that they cater to the entire workplace rather than a minority. Always remember policies are a picture of your destination, while your procedures are the road map for getting there!