



GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

*“The Future of Work is Now:
Trends, Challenges &
Strategies for an Evolving
Workplace”*

REMARKS

MR NORRIS HERBERT, PERMANENT SECRETARY
MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

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Good morning!

It is a pleasure to be with you all today in the absence of the Honourable to discuss a pertinent topic that affects us all. As employers and government we must all challenge ourselves to plan, forecast, formulate solutions and respond to the dynamism of the business landscape. I would like to commend the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce for its ongoing efforts to serve as a conduit of information, examining trends especially in emerging areas. Today's valuable ideas can be exchanged in a specialist area and learning can occur through constructive collaboration with the goal of developing a strong and sustainable national economy.

The work of the Chamber's Employment and Labour Relations Committee is indicative of the organisation's acknowledgement of the importance of labour in driving commerce and the significance of employee well-being in raising the profile, productivity and profitability of businesses.

Notwithstanding that many factors ultimately contribute to the changing patterns of work, I will take the opportunity to identify two key drivers, namely:-

- Lean enterprises – here I refer to the increasing pressure on organizations to be more competitive, agile and customer focused; and
- Continued breakthrough in communication and information technology especially mobile technologies and the internet which enable the separation of work from time and place.

Ladies and gentlemen, as the business environment evolves so too must employers and employees. These shifts impact not only technology and systems, but the way we think, communicate, and process those changes. The workplace, which reflects the wider society serves as an ideal example of our rapidly changing environment. The world is rapidly changing, and businesses and government alike have no choice but to adapt.

I mentioned lean enterprises earlier and key characteristics of a lean enterprise include:-

- Defining value from a customer's perspective;
- Value chain considerations involving linkages between internal activities and processes that add value for the customer;
- Eliminating non value added activities across the organization; and
- Reducing waste and inefficiencies in support functions e.g. overheads

What is unique about the working environment, is that while it is fast evolving, it is oftentimes the place where change must occur. As a managers, policy makers, CEOs or small business owners, a good place to start when creating strategies that influence the productivity and

profitability is the workplace. But there is a caveat—just as the workplace is where change materialises, it can also be a representation of bureaucracy, antiquated processes and inefficiency which may lead to the demise of any organisation.

Some of the main challenges facing management revolve around the infections related to organizational change and covers such topics as hierarchical structures, blurred boundaries, teams as a basic building block, new and evolving management perspectives and continuous change.

It is anticipated that several speakers will address aspects of the evolving workplace, but permit me to mention briefly Government initiatives in response to the evolving workplace, how this phenomenon is affecting the private sector and what can be done for business to remain competitive and ahead of the economic curve.

One of the most glaring impacts of the changing workplace is increased automation and flexibility. Technology does bring with it greater productivity and prosperity, but if that rate of change is too fast, it can result in redundancy and the reduced need for labour. Companies therefore need to offer the necessary flexibility—in terms of work hours, wellness programmes, a closer awareness of workers' needs, so that workers can, according to management author and behavioral scientist Daniel Pink, be motivated through increased autonomy, purpose and mastery.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago, through the Ministry of Trade and Industry, is taking its own steps to implement policies and programmes to facilitate the needs of businesses in a wide range of areas. In light of limited resources, the Government has sought to use of technology to improve the ease of doing business, through the Strengthening of the Single Electronic Window for Trade and Business Facilitation Programme. This programme aims to improve the trade performance and competitiveness of Trinidad and Tobago by optimizing and simplifying foreign trade and business processes, reducing associated time and costs of these processes; improving communication and connectivity among state institutions and with trading partners; while also modernizing the Single Electronic Window's governance. Change management is an important component of this evolution which seeks to develop a citizen-centric approach to the delivery of services in selected government agencies on the TTBizLink platform. The Government anticipates upon the conclusion of this programme, clear standards of service delivery across the agencies to the public, and a mechanism of continuous improvement and innovation in the quality of services delivered by the agencies.

Since Cabinet's approval of the US \$25 Million loan from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) for project funding and the subsequent commencement of execution of the contract in April 2016, the Ministry of Trade and Industry has successfully advanced procurement activities for sixteen (16) major consultancies representing (US \$10.25 million) of the total loan amount of the US \$25 Million. Change through these consultancies is coming to the public service.

Conclusion

The workplace is evolving and will always do so. For firms—both large and small—understanding these changes and identifying strategies for exploitation is an important and necessary exercise. In an ever-changing economy, employers must not perceive these deviations as problematic, but rather as opportunities for introspection. In response it is wise to challenge existing hierarchies, identify and develop strategic opportunities projects and programmes that nurture growth from within the organization, and most importantly, foster new and productive relationships with the individuals and groups that are your most valuable assets—your employees.

I wish you a productive and exciting day. Thank you.