



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROFESSOR MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS HRCoC WORKSHOP

16 February 2017

Kgorong Building, UNISA, Muckleneuk

- Ms NV Mokoka, Chairperson of the HRCoC and member of Unisa's Council
- Members of Unisa's HRCoC
- Dr PS Zulu, Executive Director: HR and other members of Unisa's executive and extended management here present
- Mr EM Kalenga of the Bethel Business Centre
- Members of Unisa's Human Resources Department

A very warm welcome to you all.

This workshop is both timely and appropriate. It is fitting colleagues, that we should take time out at the beginning of the year to reflect on our responsibilities as a department and as the various directorates, and to ensure clarity of purpose as well as a solid foundation on which we can build together as a team as we move into the year.

I have no need to tell anyone here just what a difficult year we had in 2016, nor do I have to explain to you the impact that this has had on our institution's resources, both financial and human. We have quite literally had to manage the university by *ad hocery* as the events unfolded during the year. This has meant that our staff – all of you included, have had to display a resilience and adaptability that has been both challenging and instructive.

However colleagues, I am convinced that had we been functioning as an optimally efficient unit and as cohesive and informed teams, we would have been able to mitigate a lot of the negative financial and operational impacts of the recent dynamics on our university. ***Put very simply, a well-run, cohesive HR Department that has clarity of vision and purpose, and whose staff understands their roles and functions and executes them professionally and without fear or favour, is not only the best possible institutional asset but also the hub around which everything else in the university revolves.*** The term “Human” Resources is not a mistake. Rob Silzer and Ben Dowell correctly assert: “Financial resources may be the lifeblood of the company, but ‘Human Resources’ are the brains.” And while the acronym CHRO usually refers to Chief Human Resources Officer, Tom Peters suggests that it stands for “Chief Hurdle Removal Officer”.

And that goes to the heart of what I would like to say to you today. Each and every single member of HR, irrespective of the role that they play, needs to be a CHRO - a *Chief Hurdle Removal Officer*. And colleagues in that spirit, I would like give you a very clear message and suggest the following:

Ensure that you know the Institutional strategy and Annual Performance Plan intimately. Know how your department and you as an individual fit(s) into the picture and what this means in terms of the professional exercising of your responsibilities. I note that after lunch you will be discussing the Key Focus Areas in relation to the

various HR directorates. I urge to you be fully engaged during this session; it is mission critical for the university and it will be the springboard from which you will launch the successful management of your directorates and your respective functions. Colleagues that means taking ownership of your role and function, using your initiative and exercising your duties armed with your professional knowledge and an in-depth understanding of our strategy and its implementation.

Let me give you an example of what I mean by this, so that we are clear.

Given our context and our strategy, Unisa is committed to cost containment measures and the optimal use of resources in regard to both our operations and our staffing. This means that without being prompted, each of you within your respective directorates should – proactively, and armed with a thorough understanding of the strategy and your professional acumen and expertise - be assessing the most mission critical institutional needs, and aligning your directorates and their operations accordingly. This, for example, can mean revising non-key appointments when it comes to hiring. If the institutional focus shifts and prioritises emerging areas while downplaying others, you need to be alert and responsive to that so that you – and Unisa - can respond with agility to the changing context and strategic thrusts.

I want to assure you that this is *your* responsibility as HR. It is not up to individual units in the institution to dictate to you what you should and should not be doing. It is HR, who after careful planning and justification must make those decisions. This will mean that HR staff have to know and understand their areas of expertise, be able to for example forecast/predict staff numbers in given areas well in advance, and then implement their plans accordingly and in good time.

But I can assure you that you will only succeed in this critical responsibility if you work as a unified team and if you support one another at all times. No one will simply accept what they will perceive as an arbitrary decision or worse still, prejudice against a department or an individual. You will therefore have to make 100 percent sure that you are able to back up and support your decisions with accurate, scientifically (analytically) verifiable information, proposals and justification.

We can no longer for example, simply fill a post because it is on a structure or because someone is due to retire. We need to make sure that the position is mission critical to the institutional strategy and its objectives. Importantly, we also need to ensure that we do not allow our personal feelings, ideologies or agendas to interfere with the professional execution of our duties. We should be sympathetic and receptive to colleagues at all times, but firm in our decisions, *because* of our confidence that we have done what is required of us with integrity and in the best interests of our university.

Above all, as HR practitioners you need to be loyal to the university and its staff, and not to any other agendas, be they personal or ideological. There is a Swahili proverb that says: “It is amazing how much people get done if they do not worry about who gets the credit.” That is a mind-set that we need to strive for.

Colleagues, Human Resource Management is a complex business. Because it straddles both the people and administrative aspects of the university it can be hugely stressful but also immensely rewarding. No Unisa employee should feel that they are being punished by the system – and yet, so many do. It is only through a humane and supportive HR Department that this will change - and each of you has a role to play.

So colleagues I trust that you will seize this wonderful opportunity today to forge a powerful, cohesive and committed HR team that will be the key driver of and contributor to Unisa's efficiency and effectiveness.

I thank you.