Why and How Should Companies Manage their Post-Crisis Recovery?

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When Crisis Increases Risk

Since the beginning of the crisis, we have been witnessing a spectacular collective effort marked by solidarity and the determination to ensure everyone's health and safety. The COVID-19 pandemic has created many challenges for all levels of government, for employers and for employees.

Employers have had to adapt their methods by changing the way work is organized. The state of emergency caused by the crisis has quickly engendered additional risk exposure. At the same time, employees have generally been understanding and flexible regarding the measures announced by employers.

Going forward, however, employee cooperation, *force majeure*, and health and safety challenges may no longer be sufficient to maintain the kind of flexibility employers and employees shared during the crisis. As a result, it is important to get back on track right away, taking only calculated risks and returning to the conventional legal framework that governs the employer-employee relationship.

Short-Term Crisis Recovery: Anticipating Challenges and Minimizing Risk

Well organized companies focused on the challenges of recovery will likely be capable of successfully commencing their recovery while keeping any associated risks linked with new measures to a minimum. The following are some suggestions on how to do so:

1. It is essential to maintain, re-establish and/or preserve an effective, open channel of communication with employees. Workers will need assurance that their return to work is being properly managed and that their health and safety is a top priority for the company.
2. Develop and implement health and safety measures for workers, or ensure that the measures already in place are

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adapted to the context of COVID-19. Employers have an obligation to ensure the health and safety of their workers and implement methods to identify, correct and control risks.
3. Establish a policy for working at home (a subject recently discussed by our expert colleagues).
4. Expect unusually high rates of absenteeism and work refusal situations and establish a plan to manage problem cases, keeping the rights and obligations of everyone involved in mind. Make sure these measures are applied in a consistent, unequivocal and uniform manner when it comes to your employees.
5. Train managers on your organization's key messages and positions in order to ensure that you are conveying a unified message. Coaching front-line managers will become even more important in the context of the recovery. Employers can evaluate the potential use of the Quebec government's PACME program (which we have reviewed) as part of their recovery plan.

The most significant challenge businesses will face in the medium-term (and probably in the long-term as well) is the very unstable economic situation and potentially declining employee cooperation.

Though many are current focused on short-term recovery, it is crucial to begin thinking of ways to help our organizations manage the crisis in the medium-term. The economic instability that will characterize this period will also create opportunities. In order to seize them, it is essential for companies to be flexible and agile. Every organization must set a solid action plan in motion now so that their human resources can operate with the flexibility that the unstable economic situation will require.

Our Labour and Employment team is prepared to support companies facing this immense challenge. We can help you. Despite the challenging circumstances, crisis can often reveal new opportunities.

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