

Trap to Avoid: Implementing New IT Systems without First Getting Buy-In



A Manitoba case is an excellent example of what can happen when you implement an HR system without first getting buy-in from the personnel who have to actually use it.

The Technological Change Grievance Case

St. Boniface Hospital put in a software system for real-time reporting of work injuries, illnesses and near misses. The system also enabled the Hospital to determine root causes, identify witnesses and implement corrective actions.

You'd think that employees would have embraced the system set up for their own protection. But some were less than impressed, including Clinical Resource Nurses (CRNs) and Change Nurses (CN) who got a memo informing them that they'd be serving as the "In Charge Person" responsible for keying employee data into the system. The union filed a grievance alleging that:

- CNs and CRNs were already overstretched and that serving as In Charge Persons imposed a "potentially overwhelming volume of new work" that would distract them from their prime directive—caring for patients;
- Accountability for reporting errors added to the nurses' already considerable stress;
- The system would compromise patient and employee privacy by requiring nurses to fill out and print incident reports at their desks where they could be seen by the public and other employees; and
- Management implemented the system unilaterally without consulting employees as required by the collective agreement.

Employer Wins the Battle. . .

In fact, the arbitration board tossed the grievance. The union's concerns were legitimate, the panel acknowledged. The employer could have done a better job rolling out the new system. Still, no laws or contracts were broken.

The employer acted "in good faith." And the "mission to upgrade health and safety reporting was a noble pursuit" with an "impressive outcome." The Hospital and IT team "are to be commended for bringing to reality an innovative system" to improve health and safety in the workplace, concluded the arbitrators [*St. Boniface Hospital v.*

Manitoba Nurses Union (St. Boniface Nurses Local 5) (Technological Change Grievance)].

. . . But Loses the War

It's nice to know that implementing an elaborate software system to ensure workplace safety isn't against the law. But while no laws were broken, the employer was guilty of poor management in rolling out the system:

- Although the system was in the works for more than 2 years, CNs and CNRs weren't apprised of their roles until a month before implementation;
- The employer didn't offer CNs and CNRs orientation or training on the new system. It just provided them a written guide;
- It reassured nurses that the system was "self-explanatory" but it proved to be confusing and tricky to master during the start-up.

The Moral

Good intentions and having the law on your side isn't enough to ensure effective implementation of HR initiatives. You also need to understand how the initiative will affect the jobs of the people you're relying on to carry it out. If you don't get the implementers on board, you're bound to spark complaints, grievances and other forms of distracting resistance that compromises the safety results the initiative produces.