

Foodie General and the Hit of Covid-19

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Description of the organization:

Foodie General is a Consumer-Packaged Goods company producing and distributing many different food brands related to groceries, snacks and frozen meals. The organization has its head office located in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada with approximately 150 office employees. The organization also has three manufacturing plants in Canada employing about 700 plant employees. These plants are located in British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec. In total, there are approximately 850 employees in Canada who are part of this organization.

The organization's head office covers several different departments, or areas of expertise, each having specific functions and responsibilities. There is Marketing (which promote the products), Research and Development (which develop new products and researches competitors and consumer behaviours), Sales (which sell the products), Finance (which focuses on costs, profits and taxes), Supply Chain (which focuses on the raw materials and distribution of finished goods across the country), Human Resources (which focuses on employees' pay, performance, occupational health and safety), and Information Technology (which helps with technology and computers to make the business run smoothly and efficiently). Although these are separate departments that are dedicated to perform different and specific tasks, but they also collaborate and communicate with each other to understand what needs to be done for the benefit of the whole organization. Employees usually work five days a week, eight hours a day. The head office building is one level, containing a kitchen, multiple meeting rooms, and cubicle offices, and an organized office area. Each area of expertise is located in a different area to have their own space and work according to their specific role and tasks.

Description of the problem:

Ava Maller is a Human Resources Generalist at Foodie General. She performs specific tasks involving recruitment, onboarding, supporting employees and managers, and answers questions about employee benefits and policies. She also supports the talent and performance management process. She leads a Joint Health and Safety Committee in conducting monthly health and safety inspections and participates in bi-monthly meetings.

As of March 2020, Covid-19 started to spread across the globe and it affected Foodie General. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, the employees and managers of the organization did

not know how to perform their work in the office, while also ensuring everyone's safety. The management and leadership teams were unsure of what to do, so they followed government mandates and guidelines and made the decision to have all office employees work remotely from home until it was safe to return to the office. Covid-19 was problematic and represented a challenge for management because the organization was not prepared to handle everyone working from home at the same time, as it did not have an emergency plan for a pandemic. The employee's position in the challenge was to keep themselves and their families safe while working from home, but still completing their tasks and collaborating with other employees. This was challenging to the employees because before Covid-19, they were meeting and collaborating in person, but during Covid-19, they were forced to meet and collaborate virtually. This virtual work environment was disruptive to productivity sometimes because of technology limitations (poor internet connections) or because of home interruptions (pets, other family members, errands). Furthermore, the employees went from being in the office working with others to immediately being isolated and independent at home, with no direct oversight of their work activities.

Covid-19 was a major challenge that the organization had to address and adapt to. Ava Maller's task was to keep up to date on the government news, the World Health Organization's recommendations, and the organization's leadership's directions, while still ensuring the organization continued to follow government guidelines in the provinces where the plants were located and in Ontario, where head office was located. There was no process in place; everyone in the organization had to learn to adapt to this problematic situation that presented itself. The organization had to wait for vaccines to be developed and administered to most of the employee base, which was out of their control. The organization monitored the numbers of Covid-19 cases and any government mandates put in place. There were many unknowns which is why this was a difficult situation. This 'work from home' continued for about two years. Now the organization wants to open head office again and have the employees gradually return to the office. Accordingly, the organization put in place certain policies to ensure employee safety, but also allowing in person collaboration and productivity (mandatory face masks, meeting room capacity limitations, staggered re-entry back to the office). The employees and management were both unsure whether these measures would be enough and whether it would result in a successful transition back to in person work at the office. Management also struggled with making sure all

employees felt safe returning to the office while easing any employee anxiety about returning to in person work, given the fluidity of the Covid-19 situation.

Discussion questions:

1. Do you think Foodie General's back to in person work plan will be successful? What else could the organization do to make sure that the transition is a success?
2. Do you think Foodie General handled this situation properly or poorly?
3. Do you think Ava Maller did enough as the Human Resources Generalist?
4. Do you think other organizations have had similar approaches of how they handled a situation like this?
5. What further actions should Foodie General take, if any, since Covid-19 is something that we continue to live with?