Industry Study – Personnel Issues

Industrial relations

Industrial relations is about people and organisations working together within the social and political systems of our society. Employment makes up a large part of our lives and determines our living standards, while the industrial relations process determines the employment conditions of the environment in which the employee works.

The commencement of the Federal Work Choices legislation in March 2006 curtailed the role of the States in the Industrial Relations system because employees of constitutional corporations are now covered by the federal system. Today, the OIR is responsible for '…monitoring employment rights, obligations and conditions in NSW', particularly with regard to unincorporated businesses, by providing advice to individuals, business and Government.

From 1 January 2010, private sector employers and employees previously covered by the NSW state award system (mainly sole traders and partnerships) move into the national workplace relations system administered by the federal government.

There are now 10 National Employment Standards (NES). They are:

- Maximum weekly hours of work – 38 hours per week, plus reasonable additional hours.
- Requests for flexible working arrangements – allows parents or carers of a child under school age or of a child under 18 with a disability, to request a change in working arrangements to assist with the child's care.
- Parental leave and related entitlements – up to 12 months unpaid leave for every employee, plus a right to request an additional 12 months unpaid leave, plus other forms of maternity, paternity and adoption related leave.
- Annual leave – 4 weeks paid leave per year, plus an additional week for certain shift workers.
- Personal/carer's leave and compassionate leave – 10 days paid personal/carer's leave, two days unpaid carer's leave as required, and two days compassionate leave (unpaid for casuals) as required.

- Community service leave – unpaid leave for voluntary emergency activities and leave for jury service, with an entitlement to be paid for up to 10 days for jury service.
- Long service leave – a transitional entitlement for certain employees who had certain LSL entitlements before 1/1/10 pending the development of a uniform national long service leave standard.
- Public holidays – a paid day off on a public holiday, except where reasonably requested to work.
- Notice of termination and redundancy pay – up to 4 weeks notice of termination (5 weeks if the employee is over 45 and has at least 2 years of continuous service) and up to 16 weeks redundancy pay, both based on length of service.
- Provision of a Fair Work Information Statement – employers must provide this statement to all new employees.

Equity/EEO

Equity and specifically Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) is about ensuring that all workplaces are free from unlawful discrimination and harassment by ensuring that workplace policies, rules and practices are fair and do not disadvantage an employee because they belong to a particular group. Employees also have a responsibility not to discriminate against fellow staff and help provide a workplace environment free of discrimination and harassment.

EEO helps groups who have been discriminated against in the past or who may continue to find themselves unfairly treated. These groups may include:

- women
- Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders
- members of racial, ethnic, and ethno-religious minority groups
- people with a disability.

People may be discriminated against for a variety of reasons including:

- age
- sex
- pregnancy
- disability
- race, colour, ethnic or ethno-religious background, descent or nationality

- marital status
- carer's responsibilities
- homosexuality
- transgender

Unions

A Trade Union is an association formed by employees to act for them inside and outside the workplace. Originally, trade unions rose in Australia for the defence and improvement of the conditions of different areas of the workforce.

A trade union works to provide benefits for and protect and promote the interests of its members by negotiating with employers, politicians, and governments through legal, political or strike actions. Most trade unions are seen to be challenging management and/or community interests.

To become a trade union the organisation must be a registered body. It must be registered with the federal or state industrial relations system. It can be registered with both systems. All official positions within the union must be filled by democratically elected members.

Unions also benefit its members by providing a range of services including financial advice, loans, legal assistance, optical and dental clinics, reduced prices on some goods and services, etc.

There are a number of trade unions that people employed with the TP&FT industries could become a member of. One of the larger trade unions is the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) FFTS Division. This trade union covers people working in the following areas:

- Wholly or partly preparing, packing, manufacturing, repairing or fixing any article of furniture,
- Upholstering,
- Wood carving,
- Finishing,
- Wood turning,
- Wood machining,

Workplace agreements
Agreements set out the conditions of employment between:

- an employee or group of employees
- their employer.

From 1 January 2010, only enterprise agreements can be made between employees and employers.

Other types of agreements made previously under the *Workplace Relations Act 2006* cover the conditions of individual employees, or a group of employees. These include:

- collective agreements
- Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs)
- Individual Transitional Employment Agreements (ITEAs)

Those agreements made prior to 1 January will continue on until they are terminated or replaced.

Enterprise agreements
Enterprise agreements can be made by an employer with a group of employees, or by more than 1 employer with groups of employees. Enterprise agreements can also be made by 1 or more employers and 1 or more unions for a genuine new enterprise before any employees that would be covered by the agreement are employed (these are called greenfields agreements).

Entry Level Training Requirements
People can make their way into a career in the Timber Products and Furniture Technologies industries in a variety of ways. Some of these include:

- University degrees - these can be done in a number of areas such as marketing, engineering, design and accounting, but there are very few, if any, university degrees that will train a person for the practical area of manufacturing products. Most people with degrees would possibly enter "white collar" roles.
- TAFE courses - this would be the best way to gain advanced training in the manufacturing area of the TP&FT industries. Recognised accounting, management and marketing courses can also be studied. TAFE generally has up to date equipment

and machinery and Industry Placements can be done to give you a first hand experience of the industry.

- Apprenticeships - many people complete apprenticeships in a variety of fields such as carpentry, shop fitting or in other areas that relates to the TP&FT industries. This includes some time at TAFE as well as on the job training. Many people do this straight from school.
- Start your own business. This can be done with no experience whatsoever. If this is the way you choose to enter the TP&FT industries bear in mind that a very high percentage of businesses fail within their first three years of operation. It is best to have some experience and gain some knowledge of the market before you start your own business in the very competitive TP&FT industries.

Career/training opportunities & the Role of Industry Personnel

There are a variety of career opportunities available in the TP&FT industries. Depending on the position of the employee they may be involved in:

- The training of staff,
- Management,
- Manufacturing,
- Finishing,
- An official capacity within a trade union,
- Ensuring safety in a workplace.

There are a large variety of areas that staff could become involved in. Most staff will have some relationship with staff in other areas.

There are also opportunities to move up the management tree through the completion of external courses or by receiving internal promotions.

Specialisation and Multi-skilling

When new technologies, including both equipment and processes, are introduced into the workplace people need to be retrained so that they can use the new equipment. Training can be done in house, though a recognised course or may be provided by the vendor of the new equipment as part of the purchase. People may then become specialist employees who are proficient at the use of one or two items of equipment of very good at completing specific processes.

When a person becomes proficient at more than one area of the business they become multi-skilled. They should now be more valuable to the business as they may be doing the job of more than one person, but in an acceptable time. The business also only pays one wage to this person. Multi-skilling of employees can improve staff morale as they are doing less repetitive tasks, production can be improved in quality and quantity produced due to having people able to perform more than one role.

Work practices

Work practices can be generally defined as those activities completed by employees and employers in the operation of a business. The activities happen in all areas of the business such as the office, factory and transportation of materials and products.

The term ‘flexible work practices' is something being promoted by the government and is aimed at covering all of the innovative ways employers and employees can agree to structure work to accommodate business and individual needs.

Creating these flexible work practices may include:

- Phased retirement
- Part-time work
- Job-sharing
- Working from home
- Flexible working hours
- Flexible leave options
- Contracting

The benefits of developing flexible work practices in industry may include:

- More skilled and motivated staff, including mature age workers who are attracted to organisations with flexible working policies.
- Higher staff retention, with a more energetic, committed, happy and focused workforce.
- The ability to attract staff that might have otherwise been unable to work.
- Savings on recruitment and retraining costs.
- Reduced absenteeism and stress as flexibility helps employees meet their outside commitments more easily.