

## Workplace culture

The current debate regarding whether the Fair Work Act is 'fair' to employers and employees equally is bogged down in an adversarial manner typical of similar debates over the last century.

Minister Julia Gillard has been at pains to inject a new philosophy into this debate. Ms Gillard recently stated: "*The debates been had. Resolved.....it is what more can be done on the intangibles in some ways, of workplace culture, but which makes a difference to workplace productivity*". \*

Workplace culture sounds like a fine idea but what does it mean?

It means the existence of a workplace environment where teamwork is second nature and trust is entrenched. Teamwork and trust depend on open, empathic and effective communication between all stakeholders. It also means that all employees regardless of rank, should be treated with equal respect.

The long established saying that "what gets measured gets done" also applies to workplace culture. Also "what gets trained gets done". A Workplace Communications Program is such a tool.

A properly prepared program commences at the start of an employee's working life via an induction workshop, and continues throughout his/her employment by complementing other related programs including OHS and EEO. A 'mother' or 'umbrella' Workplace Communications Program incorporates all elements that entrench a positive workplace culture.

This proposal describes the individual segments that define the concept. Not all segments are required to successfully implement the proposal but an optimum result will more likely result from utilisation of all elements.

### Workplace Consultative Committee

The role of a Workplace Consultative Committee is to provide an avenue for improving communication throughout the organisation. This is seen as a way of building a supportive culture based on trust and developing morale in the organisation. The committee is an explicit recognition of the importance of a consultative style of management within the organisation.

The committee meets quarterly and has a number of staff elected representatives as members in addition to a senior executive level person (employee or consultant) as Chairman. There is also a training representative and a middle management representative.

The Chairman also heads a small team of skilled Contact Officers.

The following areas, that will cultivate an excellent workplace culture, are organised and monitored by the committee through a formal Workplace Communications Program.

1. Harmonious workplaces. The ability of staff and management to enjoy respectful and productive relationships is a key objective. Workshop training in dispute resolution and mediation techniques is paramount.
2. Simply the Best Workplaces in Australia - research paper extract. Attainment of excellent workplaces is an obvious objective of the program. The University of Sydney research paper motivated this module. An extract is located in the program.
3. Workplace Health and Safety. Management of OHS issues such as 'stress related illnesses' is addressed in the program. This is a key element in the overall program as it assists in identifying stress related OHS issues at an early juncture, thereby minimising legal and rehabilitation costs. Savings can be significant with workplace culture being appropriately strengthened at the same time. Bullying is addressed in this section.
4. The program objective is to provide healthy and safe workplaces and to optimise the people skills of staff and management by developing their dispute resolution techniques, through workshops, thereby promoting positive attitudes and fostering harmonious stimulating workplaces. Mediation and Listening Profile Analysis are key items. Contact Officers have a role in assisting management with the practical application of the program. Workplace Communications workshops are conducted at least once a year as induction training, primarily, but not exclusively, for the participation of new managers, supervisors and contact officers.

5. Managers are trained to focus on the benefits to be gained by the inclusion of all staff in resolving workplace productivity and relationship issues.
  
6. The Workplace Consultative Committee is also responsible for monitoring the EEO Program. Contact Officers are also trained to handle EEO complaints.

\* *"Only the beginning" article by Ewin Hannan - The Weekend Australian August 29-30 2009*

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