



YOUR REFERENCE:

PLEASE QUOTE
MY REFERENCE

A59 (C);A45 (A) JM:SH

18 September 2003

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

**RE: INQUIRY INTO INCREASING PARTICIPATION IN PAID
EMPLOYMENT**

As per your email dated 9 July 2003, please find attached Thuringowa City Council's response to the House of Representatives Standing Committee - Inquiry into Increasing Participation in Paid Employment document.

We look forward to hearing further from you in the near future.

Yours sincerely

**JENNY MUNDT
MANAGER HUMAN RESOURCE UNIT
THURINGOWA CITY COUNCIL**

Cc: File



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THURINGOWA CITY COUNCIL – RESPONSE:

“Inquiry into Increasing Participation in Paid Employment”

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations

General Comments

The Council of Thuringowa City (Council) has experienced a decreased participation in applications from suitable potential employees coinciding along side tacit and professional knowledge leaving the organisation. Most particularly, difficulties have been noted in specific professional streams such as Building Certification, Town Planning, Environmental Health, Engineering and Information Services.

Feedback has identified issues such as:

- Aging population – baby boomers
- Decreasing pool of suitably qualified applicants
- Increasing level of legislative control
- Reluctance to relocate to Northern Queensland
- Remuneration
- Work/life Balance issues

These issues challenge our ability to effectively and efficiently staff Council whilst at the same time recognising that all organisations are now a part of a global marketplace which demands high service quality and delivery. To maintain our competitive advantage then, the attraction, retention and development of our people is of critical importance for our future.

In responding to your submission request then, we note your verbal advices that, ideally, contributions will provide information on current and proposed strategies to increase participation in paid employment as well as barriers to the implementation of same.

Specific Comments

Current Programs within Council

For Thuringowa City Council, the priority vehicle in effecting organisational change has been the *enterprise bargaining* processes. Enterprise bargaining ensures an *effective management tool* to initiate and manage organisation specific change. It is

therefore imperative to our current operations to ensure that the management of the enterprise bargaining process remains unique to individual organisations.

Birthered out of our enterprise bargaining, Council has implemented a range of policies and guidelines to support organisational change and prepare us for the future. These are identified following.

Council is committed to becoming a healthy learning organisation with many programs and policies now in place to "grow our own" people. For example, the Further Education Policy provides tangible practical and financial assistance to broaden our people's knowledge base. Other programs of particular note are the "whole of Council" workshops such as:

- Covey principles
- Quality Customer Service
- Problem Solving
- Various supervisory and/or general work related workshopping.

Council has also identified the need to address work/life balance issues; not only to provide a great environment for our people to work from, but also as an attraction and retention strategy with the on-flow effect of maintaining organisational knowledge. Various localised polices and practices have been introduced over the past few years such as:

- Career Break Policy
- Home Based Work Arrangements Policy
- Flexible working provisions
- Child care options
- Recognition and Long Service programs with celebration dinners
- Paid Maternity leave

Council has also commenced a knowledge management initiative entitled the "Innovation Development Evaluation and Application" (IDEA) program. A general outline of the IDEA program is as follows:

"The IDEA program utilises a supple yet methodical process to develop and evaluate product (services, projects, products, work processes) concepts in order to establish viability pre-development. IDEA is employed across the organisation to capture ideas (for products, projects, programs, cost saving initiatives, efficiency improvements and other) and is a tool to work collaboratively (inter departmentally) to draw upon in-house skill sets to best consider the viability and options of the idea in a case-by-case basis. IDEA also provides an opportunity to recognise innovation, creative and lateral thinking in the organisation.

By utilising IDEA Thuringowa City Council is managing to achieve several outcomes:

- *Capture great ideas from a range of sources staff, elected representatives, community and others.*
- *Acknowledge staff ideas*
- *Investigate ideas from a range of qualifiers (quantitative and qualitative) for decision makers in our organisation to make informed choices and investment decisions."*



Other relevant policies and programs implemented by Council include:

- Graduate placement programs
- Traineeships
- Apprenticeships
- Work for the Dole Program placements
- Community Jobs Program placements
- EEO and Harassment Policies

Plans for the Future

"Whereas the 20th century belonged to the young, the 21st century will be ruled by the 'new old' " (Ken Dychtwald, Public Management July 2003)

This statement encapsulates the shift in focus now required of organisations in terms to workforce planning. That is, where once we concentrated on training up the young, we now recognise there is a complimentary need to train or retrain those in their thirties, forties and fifties as these will be the people who will be able to sustain our businesses in the future. That is, as the "brains" of our organisations move towards retirement, we need to develop innovative knowledge management programs that can retain intellectual and tacit organisational knowledge. Options currently being considered by our HR team include:

- developing consultancy opportunities for retired ex-employees,
- increased flexibility in positions such as increasing part-time workforce in professional and senior management,
- job redesign or re-skilling to provide alternative career options,
- comprehensive individually tailored leadership development and succession planning programs.

Council is also currently developing its Indigenous Employment Strategy to increase Indigenous employment via skills/career pathways. It is envisaged that these pathways will provide for not only the traditional traineeships and apprenticeships but also pathways towards professional positions.

Barriers

In response for your request for Council to identify barriers to increased participation in paid employment, please find following our suggestions.

Due to an increasingly competitive environment and escalating legislative requirements/accountabilities, supervisory workloads are subsequently increasing markedly. This places considerable strain upon any organisation's budgetary responsibilities which, in turn, limits its capacity to increase staff and physical resourcing. Further, legislative changes frequently require time away from the "coal face" to undergo compulsory or necessary training again causing further strain on already stretched work units. The "working smarter" ideology only carries some weight. There comes a point though where people become purely overloaded regardless of how efficient they are. Viability strategies, including restructuring, economies of scale, downsizing, and business partnerships are sometimes effective means to meet these challenges only to a certain extent.



To meet this challenge, some well resourced organisations are now needing to employ Risk Managers or similar to juggle and consolidate the multitude of continuing changing legislative requirements especially within the fields of environment, human resources/industrial relations and workplace health & safety. Other options may include the need to set up organisational specific learning centers and employ permanent facilitators to ensure employees are keep up to date.

Organisations are therefore in a critical position of need under this increasingly heavier load. Simplification of reporting requirements, provision of organisation specific government sponsored resourcing or provision of assistance (either physical or monetary) may provide organisations with considerable opportunities to increase paid employment on a number of fronts. For example, anecdotal feedback suggests that capable people are now opting out of pursuing some careers as the perceived lack of work/life balance is becoming less attractive. Further, as more resourcing became available, further job creation could follow.

Organisations today are also becoming increasingly aware of societal obligations and are tapping into government funded community based programs to provide for their communities. Nevertheless, even though the position themselves may be funded to a certain extent or are voluntary, the supervisory load can require considerable time and support on the organisation's part. Benefits do ensue when such employees gain permanent employment with the organisation but this is not always possible.

On the other hand, organisations may now be missing out on opportunities to establish future career prospects for tradespeople by outsourcing apprenticeships. Where once apprentices became familiar with the organisational culture and often continued on, now apprentices are often employed through group schemes and can move around somewhat throughout their apprenticeship period. Again, the extra resourcing now involved in supervisory oversight can impact markedly on organisation's ability to take on board organisation based apprenticeships.

Other government policy issues also could be reviewed. For example, with the increasing participation in the workforce of older people, current superannuation and age of retirement barriers could be reviewed to encourage rather than discourage continued opportunities to remain in the workforce.

This leads to another topic that needs some thought. That is, the management of workplace health & safety concerns of an aging workforce. Organisations, obviously, have a responsibility to ensure a healthy and safe working environment. The challenge for organisations then is how to marry the inevitable health complications of an aging workforce with the need to ensure productivity in a competitive market.

We look forward to hearing further from you as these issues are of keen interest to Council.


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