

**Employer/employee relations**

Employer/employee relations refer to the communication that takes place between representatives of employees and employers. Much of the employee relations involve employees and employers working together. Indeed, part of the aim of the European Union's social policy today is to create a system of shared responsibility of employers and employees for working practices, conditions and other areas of working life. This policy of shared responsibility is called co-determination.

Discussions between employers and employees typically cover the following areas:

- \* pay
- \* bonuses
- \* the work environment
- \* disputes
- \* work schedules
- \* grievances
- \* health and safety
- \* hours of work
- \* production targets.

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) was set up in 1974 to try and create more harmonious working relationships in this country. It negotiates in disputes between employers and employees as well as establishing codes of practice and principles for harmonious relationships. It has been tremendously successful in its work because today there are relatively few major employment relations disputes in this country. Where problems start to arise in a company, it is an easy process to consult with Acas to find ways of improving relationships. Because Acas has experience of dealing with so many workplaces it is able to suggest guidelines for harmonious relationships in nearly all situations.

Successful employer/employee relations involve striking a balance of interests. From the employer's point of view, industrial relations is about having the right to manage - the ability to plan for the future so that a company can continue to be a success, to make profits for its shareholders and to keep its employees motivated. From the employee's point of view, it is all about securing the best possible conditions and living standards for employees.

**High labour turnover**

Where employees are not happy with working conditions this frequently leads to high labour turnover, bad timekeeping, and high levels of absenteeism. It may also occur in the form of slackness by individuals, poor working, deliberate time wasting and similar practices. Other evidence of discontent will be revealed in complaints, friction, ignoring rules and apathy.

There are a number of forms of organised trade union action, including:

- \* withdrawal of goodwill
- \* a go slow
- \* working strictly to the rules set out in work rulebooks and sticking rigidly to only doing tasks set out clearly in a job description
- \* refusing to work overtime
- \* going on strike.

All of these actions are undesirable:

- \* they reduce company profitability, and its' ability to fulfil orders

- \* they harm employment prospects, and reduce wages of employees
- \* they lead to festering discontent
- \* they cause problems for customers and the economy as a whole.

Thus it is very important to create harmonious workplaces for the benefit of all concerned. The work of Acas therefore is primarily concerned with outlining good practice and models of harmonious working practice.

A trade union is an organised group of employees who have joined together in an officially recognised organisation to further their common interests. These employees may have in common a skill, a trade, an industry, an employer or an occupation. Some unions (general unions) are made up of workers in several industries. Trade unions are formed, financed and run by their members.