

Five steps to effective management



Phil Teece

Manager,
personnel &
industrial relations

The employment policies of many organisations consist of a broad vision statement, supported by action plans covering different subject areas. Frequently, these are developed separately by different people. They are often fundamentally inconsistent.

For some time, 'strategic management' has been a popular concept. More recently, personnel policies in many libraries have taken up the same ideas to promote strategic fit between employment practices and business goals. But, as this column has pointed out, there is often a chasm between what organisations say and what they actually do in this regard.

In a recent analysis (*Human resources update*, CCH Australia, July 1996), Professor Michael Quinlan from the School of Industrial Relations and Organisational Behaviour at the University of New South Wales confirms many of our reservations. Strategic elements in human resource management are more apparent than real, he says. In practice, only those links between employment and operational policies which do not challenge senior management's own perceptions are usually established. As a result, commitment to shared vision remains little more than rhetoric.

According to Quinlan, part of the reason for this is a flawed but pervasive notion of what management actually is. Management refers to both a structure in the organisation and an activity or process. Currently, far too little attention is paid to effective integration of the many generic tasks which make up the actual task of managing. And too much focus is on leadership. This is effectively a top-down concept which gives scant attention to the involvement of staff.

Disappointingly, even the recent major statement on management education — the *Karpin report* — generally adopts this same focus. Thus, while some references are made to using the talents of staff to achieve outcomes, there is very little comment on increasing worker participation. And it is taken as given that goals and practices will be set entirely by management. This is made worse because most organisations lack a rational, co-ordinated structure for decision making. Instead, there is an operating style which fails to reconcile competing perspectives — between, for example, a production, engineering, accounting or personnel focus. Existing models of strategic management have failed to address these continuing tensions.

Quinlan says a more integrated approach

to managing employment is essential. While the diversity of organisations makes it impossible to specify a single process for them all, Quinlan argues that five characteristics are necessary for effective employment policies. *First*, there must be genuine senior management commitment to valuing employees and managing their input. This needs to be based on much more than just concern with costs or legal compliance. It must be demonstrated through concrete action on a continuing basis, rather than just asserted in slogans or statements in corporate plans and annual reports.

Second, employment issues must not be seen as an afterthought — something subsidiary to mainstream work and management. They should be integrated into 'normal' activity. As an example, health and safety hazards are often seen as an aberration when, in fact, they are simply a result of normal work processes. They will not be removed until decision-making includes consideration of such matters automatically as part of the process of establishing work methods. Assessment of managers which measures performance against staff morale, health and safety and other employment indicators can do much to bring employment factors into core management.

The *third* requirement is for an integrated systems approach to employment programs. The employment policies of many organisations consist of a broad vision statement, supported by action plans covering different subject areas. Frequently, these are developed separately by different people. They are often fundamentally inconsistent. The same applies to the use of specific management techniques. Business Process Re-engineering (BPR), for example, with its strong mechanistic focus on 'lean and mean' rationalisation and cost cutting, may be totally contradictory to a Human Resource Management (HRM) program emphasising individual career planning and staff development. For integration, an effort must be made to ensure consistency across all employment and operational policies and practices. Fundamental to this is compulsory interaction between staff engaged in different change processes, so that groups involved in enterprise bargaining, workplace reform, training and develop-

These and other job advertisements may be found on our website, ALIANet, at <http://www.alia.org.au/alia/aliappointments.html>. Some late-breaking advertisements not appearing in inCite appear exclusively on ALIANet.

ment or health and safety committees, for example, share information and collaborate with each other.

Fourth, systems for employment management must be able to accommodate the effects of change. Today, few programs pay more than lip service to change, Quinlan says. If major adjustments are to be introduced, it is essential that managements give far more attention to the risks arising, in terms of threats to staff morale and productivity. At present, there are far too many cases of improvement programs, which are introduced with a fanfare of clichés, only to be soon seen by staff as a vehicle for increased work and stress. They are guaranteed to fail.

Fifth, and most importantly, an effective personnel management system will value real employee input. Quinlan says the most fundamental and recurring inconsistency in organisations today is the existence of one set of statements and policies which stress the value of the workforce, and another set of practices which ignore, undermine or contradict this emphasis. All of ALIA's current experience in assisting members with their many workplace challenges supports this view. Until this is confronted, talk of organisational partnership and shared interests between worker and manager, will remain no more than hollow words. The simplest way to change this is to genuinely involve employees.

Finally, it is worth noting that many organisations are now seeking to remove trade unions from their operating environment. The policies currently used, and particularly their failure to take account of employee concerns, seem most unlikely to achieve that goal. And Quinlan sounds a salutary note of caution in this respect. Managers seeking a non-union nirvana, he says, should remember that, from the human relations school of the 1930s to the socio-technical systems theory of the 1960s, many attempts have been made to supplant unions with local workplace teams. All have failed. If managers wish to do better in this latest attempt, a changed approach to their staff, such as that urged by Professor Quinlan, will be an essential minimum step. ■

Electronic Publishing Sales

US-based company producing reference databases on electronic media (CD-ROM, database licensing, and online) is seeking a motivated and energetic sales representative located in Sydney. Some interstate & NZ travel required.

The range of products is designed for use in various areas of the library market (public & school libraries, health sciences, business, universities, etc), and experience with electronic resources is essential.

Commencing remuneration is \$30,000.00 with commission on sales paid monthly. Please respond in writing to Tim Brookes, PO Box 603, Neutral Bay Junction, NSW 2089.

NOTRE DAME

The University of Notre Dame Australia



Law Librarian

The University of Notre Dame Australia is a Catholic University dedicated to academic excellence, personal service to students, and the development of a caring, learning environment based upon Christian faith and values. In 1996 the University enrolled more than 1000 students at its campuses in Fremantle and Broome.

The University invites applications for the above position which will involve a range of library duties with special responsibility for supporting the teaching and research programs of the College of Law. The Librarian will be part of a small management team responsible to the University Librarian. Commencement will be January 1997.

Essential criteria for the position are:

- * degree in library or information studies or equivalent
- * eligibility for membership of ALIA (Australian Library and Information Association)
- * a sound knowledge of the particular nature of a Law Library
- * significant experience in the provision of legal information services preferably in an academic library
- * availability for rostered duties
- * an understanding of and commitment to the Catholic ethos of the University

Salary commensurate with experience and qualifications.

Applications, including a curriculum vitae and names and contact numbers of referees, for this position close Monday 30 September 1996 and must be forwarded to:

The Registrar
Ms Mary-Eileen Gaunt
The University of Notre Dame Australia
PO Box 1225, Fremantle WA 6160
Telephone (09) 239 5555
Facsimile (09) 239 5544

(more ALIAppointments continued overleaf)