

Onus on employers to improve productivity, say experts

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Government needs to look beyond strikes and other forms of industrial action and address the causes of workplace conflict, say workplace relations experts in a submission to the Productivity Commission inquiry.

Monash Business School's Australian Consortium for Research on Employment and Work (ACREW) produced the submission into the workplace relations framework, calling on government to move away from overly prescriptive legislation.

They also argued that it is time to move beyond knee-jerk legislation in response to sectional interests and open up a wider community debate on the requirements for a good workplace relations system.

Director of ACREW Professor Julian Teicher said the focus must change.

"The strike is not the main game here, but it is the most visible. What is more damaging is the pervasive individualised conflicts that lead to huge costs in labour turnover, absenteeism and such," Professor Teicher said.

"In our most recent national survey of 1400 senior managers responsible for human resources, 82 per cent of organisations reported experiencing at least one individual dispute in the past year. Most commonly these were interpersonal conflicts and disagreements with supervisors.

Professor Teicher said on average respondents spent 10 per cent of their time resolving individual disputes. For organisations with more than 500 employees that meant an average of 14 hours per week.

"Measures such as cutting penalty rates and reducing the protections against unfair dismissal which are being advocated by some interest groups will not enhance organisational performance or employee wellbeing," Professor Teicher said.

"Ultimately it is up to businesses to build the type of work environment that will maximise employee well being and organisational performance."

Geoff McGill, ACREW adjunct research fellow and co-author of the submission, believes the Productivity Commission must look beyond the short-term issues for the long-term.

"The Productivity Commission needs to make sense of a very large number of submissions, which reflect particular interests and concerns," said Mr McGill, a former senior executive with Rio Tinto Zinc and the Commonwealth Bank.

"Our submission urges the Commission to take a step up and look at the overall process the Inquiry should adopt in order to promote a policy debate about reforms that can be sustained over the longer term."

Provided by Monash University

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