

Information Overload

Registrant Resources Edition

Issue 84, January 2010

Welcome:

Welcome to the first edition for 2010. We hope you enjoyed the Christmas and New Year break and are already gearing up for what looks like a massive year.

We hope you took the time to do the goal setting exercise provided in the last edition, this should provide you with a framework for your personal and professional development, not just for 2010 but for every year from here on in.

This first edition, we would like to draw your attention to Duties vs. Job Descriptions. This does not just apply to our contract employees whereby we advise everyone to make sure they do correlate, but to everyone. We have what is known as “scope creep” which we will look at in some detail and how that impacts on you and your colleagues.

We would like to thank you in advance for forwarding on this edition to interested friends and colleagues. If you would like to read any of the back issues of this edition or the main edition of Information Overload you can find these on our web site - <http://www.iea.com.au>.

Lorraine Bradshaw
Marketing Coordinator & Projects Officer

In this issue we will look at:

- Go Home on Time Day
- Scope Creep
- Workplace Stress Costing the Economy billions every year
- A Thought to ponder

Go home on time day

The Australian Institute nominated the 25th November 2009 as National Go Home on Time Day – did you? Go home on time that is? According to their completed survey, it was estimated that “employers” owe their employees something like \$72 billion in unpaid overtime.

The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) stated the main reasons why people feel they need to work unpaid overtime are:

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Information Enterprises Australia Pty Ltd
Unit 4, Upper Level, 201 High Street, FREMANTLE WA 6160
Tel: 08 9335 2533 Fax: 08 9335 2544 e-mail: training@iea.com.au

- Fears over job security and
- No choice because of increased workloads and diminishing staff

Human Resources / Leader 24 November 2009 p7

- Have you worked overtime and did not receive compensation for doing so?
- Have you ever taken work home because of looming deadlines, or felt that you had to?
- Have you had to take on more work because a colleague left the business and there was an expectation that you would “pick up the slack?”
- Is it expected of you?

Whilst some of the above relates to “scope creep” which we will discuss in depth in just a moment, there is an expectation by most employers that if we want to keep our jobs we will do what is required, and if we don’t there will be someone willing to step in and do it for us. There is also an expectation that there is an element of “non-productive” time in everyone’s day and can therefore do a little more than they currently do.

But at what point do employees start to lose control? If you find yourself or your colleagues being asked to take on more and more work, without being compensated for it, you may be justified in asking for a review of both your job descriptions and salary range. But the biggest telling factor is in the stress and strain it can cause if it goes on for too long.

For example, an employer may feel justified in asking you to cover for someone who is going to be away for a couple of days, or if the person leaves the organisation suddenly. However, asking you to fill in (whilst still doing your current workload) whilst they go through the employment process, or if the person is on extended leave – can be problematic. If you find yourself having to work back late, miss lunch breaks and start early just to keep on top of the work load then it is time to go back to your line manager and explain (if they are too blinded by their own workload to notice) what is happening.

You see, what can and does happen is “natural attrition”. Your employer has every intention of finding someone to cover the role, but issues such as the financial crisis make organisations question whether they can use the salary of the person for other things. And usually the answer is – YES. Once that money has “gone” it is very hard to get it back. And if you are seen to be the strong and silent type – they can only assume you had the capacity to take on extra work, so therefore **you** must have been not working to your full capacity – they will feel justified for making the decision to let the other position go.

But given the 20 billion or so hours of unpaid overtime we have given to our employers, maybe now is the time to look at your duties vs. your job descriptions and get some sort of equality back into your life. We’re not talking “Work / Life Balance” rather being paid an equitable rate for the work we are expected to undertake – within a “normal” working week.

Scope Creep

As we have mentioned above, scope creep usually occurs when people leave a business.

As we saw during the first part of the normalisation process businesses go through during any down-turn, people were laid off and some services were cut. However, as we have also mentioned in previous editions of *Overload* – we may lose people for a number of reasons,

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but we never seem to lose all the jobs / work they did and the people who remain are the ones who are expected to do the work as a result. You “pick up the slack” of people who have been made redundant, or who found a job with another organisation. As you know, the tasks are usually divided between the remaining workers, it may not seem like you are being asked to do much more – but how many times has that happened to you and you didn’t receive part of the other person’s salary for doing so? I don’t know of ANY instance where that has been the case. Our job descriptions may get amended, but rarely does our salary match the additional duties.

Given Australia appears to be coming out of the “recession” we can see the usual scaling up of the businesses happening. We are getting more work / orders but we don’t have the right number of staff to operate at maximum efficiency – so we may feel “put upon” and start to disrupt the business we are in. We may not do it deliberately, but it can and does happen. We’re late, we “chuck a sickie”, we find excuses to stay in the kitchen talking about last night’s television programs and so on. If we begin to get disruptive it may come to the notice of senior management, but rather than recognise the problem for what it was – they see you as the first person on the list for sackings / redundancies next time around.

But scope creep does not just occur when people leave of course. There are other elements of scope creep which we need to discuss.

The first relates to contract staff.

If you are in the process of looking for contract staff, usually the first thing an employment agency asks for is a job description or list of duties the person is going to be asked to undertake. This forms the basis of how much money the person will be paid. You are paid for the job / work and rarely for your qualifications (which is something to think about).

There are many issues at stake:

Whilst an employment agency will try and determine whether the JDF is up to date, sometimes they are not worth the paper they are printed on and the duties you are asked to do, do not relate to the duties you were told the job was about. Does this sound familiar? Believe me when I say it happens all too often and it is usually because HR don’t understand the subtleties of our profession. No offence to them, but even today some people (and not just HR) still think Records Management is Filing and being a Librarian involves sticking books back on shelves!!

But this is where an employment agency relies on the people it places to advise them. It is no good telling us – AFTER the contract has ended there was a problem between Duties and the Job Description – rather it should be stated whilst the contract is going on so we can do something about it.

The other BIG problem we face is something we hate to see, but it still appears:

“Other duties as required”

This is almost a carte blanche for employers to get someone in at a lower rate, and asking them to do work relating to a much higher grade / skill level. I’m sure there are many of you who have taken on work that you were too highly qualified for – and when the employer

found out just what you were capable of – started giving you NEW duties to go with your other ones.

Of course, you may be happy to help out, after all who knows where a contract position may end up. But you need to make sure you are not being taken advantage of (which is usually the case). Again it is up to you to tell your agency – or if you are full time, then you really do need to tell your managers and HR what is happening.

Imagine for one moment that you were contracted to work on machine A. That was OK because you knew how to work on Machine A. Then the person on Machine B went on holiday and you were asked to “keep an eye on it”. You’ve never had training on Machine B of course, so when it breaks down, you feel obliged to have a look, after all it can’t be that different from the machine you are currently qualified for. Not only do we have a potential for asking for and getting more money – after all you have taken on more duties and responsibilities – but there is a massive risk for accidents and injury because you didn’t happen to mention that you didn’t actually know how Machine B worked.

Workplace Stress Costing the Economy Billions Every Year

To put this into perspective, if we are working 20 billion hours of unpaid overtime, that eventually leads to stress. According to a study by Medibank “Workplace Stress is costing the Australian economy \$14.2 billion a year, and Australian workers miss an average 3.2 working days a year” as a result. Human Resources / Leader 6 December 2009 p7

Which is something to think about before taking on those extra duties.

With many thoughts

Lorraine

A Thought to Ponder

“Employees are legally entitled to refuse to work overtime for nothing, but the reality is that many workers believe they will either lose their job or be overlooked for promotion if they don’t”

Jeff Lawrence, ACTU Secretary

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Information Enterprises Australia Pty Ltd
Unit 4, Upper Level, 201 High Street, FREMANTLE WA 6160
Tel: 08 9335 2533 Fax: 08 9335 2544 e-mail: training@iea.com.au