



The University of Sydney

FACULTY OF
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Managing and Working Today: Key Issues in *Work Choices*

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A policy transformation?

- The Prime Minister on 26 May 2005:

‘the workplace relations package released today does represent the most fundamental modernisation of our system yet seen’.



Was he right?

Yes, because of:

- The introduction of one, national industrial relations framework;
- The use the corporations power to do so;
- *Direct* legislation for minimum standards;
- All but eradicating the award system.

But, if anything, this list understates the changes and disguises important assumptions about employment relations.



The breadth of change

- Remaking the Commonwealth
- Transforming liberalism
- Transforming work:
 - welfare to work
 - the ‘enterprise worker’
- Relocating Australia in the global economy



... but more to be done?

Addressing the intersections of public and private life:

- Paid maternity and paternity leave
- Childcare

Addressing other policy intersections:

- Between labour law, bargaining and economic goals

In all cases, these matters are explicitly left to the 'market' or to employees and employers in individual workplaces.

A set of assumptions involved in this new and unusual – Australian – policy?



The story so far

Controversial – as the election draws closer.
Mixed because of the genuine diversity
between sectors, regions and by gender.
But, plainly, processes and outcomes are
already changing.

... And areas of concern ...?



A major concern

Employment relations today for low-paid women workers:

- Explored in the 'Vulnerable Workers Project'.
- Our studies built on the 'WESKI Report' which identified 'at risk' sectors in a post-award system of employment relations: in retail, care-work, process work, cleaning.
- We conducted interviews across Australia to build on this quantitative research.



The VWP – some of the findings

1. Loss of penalty rates and loadings
2. Unilaterally imposed changes in hours and work patterns
3. Instant dismissals
4. Insecurity and new norms at work
5. Heightened managerial power
6. Lack of voice
7. Less satisfaction at work
8. Threats to women's independence
9. Stress on relationships
10. Community life



What does this mean for managers?

Opportunities and problems in a very new context:

- Competition in many sectors is intensely local – it's not 'global' at all.
- Arguably, *more* complexities for managers – things are neither simpler nor necessarily fairer.
- Without *guaranteed* minima for employees and with the rise of sub-contracting, life becomes harder for the 'fair employer'.
- Many 'personnel' problems may, even with goodwill, be intractable.