

**NISC**

NATIONAL INDUSTRY SKILLS COMMITTEE

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**Good Practice Workforce Strategies**

**Case Studies**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

This *Good Practice Workforce Strategies Case Studies* guide has been developed on behalf of the National Industry Skills Committee (NISC) to assist employers address their future skill and workforce needs.

Australia's economy is booming and with the job market saturated with unfilled vacancies, many companies are experiencing the effects of not planning for their workforce needs.

For those companies that have put in place effective workforce development plans, getting and retaining the skilled people they need is much easier. These companies have adopted a wide range of strategies to maximise their access to the staff they need to keep growing during a time of extraordinary economic growth.

The greatest challenge facing businesses today is a shortage of skilled personnel, in particular in the trades and technical occupations. Innovative recruitment and retention initiatives are critical to businesses in competing for and retaining that labour.

This guide draws on good practice case studies and examples of workforce development strategies both in Australia and internationally. It is envisaged that other case studies will be progressively added to this document.

The case studies were chosen on the basis of their successful strategies in tackling the important workforce development issues. Critical issues include:

- Staff retention, especially highly qualified and skilled personnel and apprentices who have had significant investment in their skills development;
- The importance of linking with schools and school students and leavers to meet company skill requirements;
- Mentoring of staff to develop and maintain their skill levels;
- The benefits of developing career pathways through systematic succession planning;
- Valuing older workers and developing programs which ensure that their knowledge of company processes and clients are not lost, through knowledge creation and retention strategies including phased retirement;
- The benefits, especially in remote areas, of recruiting from the local Indigenous population, and introducing strategies to nurture and mentor their participation in the workforce; and
- Building staff loyalty through the provision of generous employee packages and a caring and supportive workforce culture.

In addressing these issues, the case studies have been structured around the following key themes:

- Training, Development and Career Path Planning
- Addressing Skill Shortages
- Strategies to Address An Ageing Workforce
- Supporting the Workforce Participation of Under-represented and Disadvantaged Groups
- Fostering a Supportive Work Culture

Together with the companion paper, the *Environmental Scan of Trends and Developments Impacting on the Australian Workforce*, this Guide provides valuable insights into the workforce strategies of Australian industries and will help you better understand where staff opportunities exist for you and your company.

## 2. COMPLEMENTARY INITIATIVES

There are a range of approaches to workforce development and several initiatives underway in Australia, with plenty of information available on the internet. Links to some key initiatives and groups involved in industry and enterprise workforce planning and development are provided below:

### **Australian Institute for Social Research**

The Australian Institute for Social Research ARC Linkage Project examines demographic change, ageing and the workforce, through the development of an integrated model to inform workforce development planning in Australia. The project aims to inform the development of strategies to address gaps and labour shortages arising from the ageing of the workforce. Further information can be found about this initiative at <http://www.aisr.adelaide.edu.au/projects/workforcedev>

### **Mining Industry Skills Strategy**

In December 2007, the Mining Industry Skills Centre and the Queensland Government launched the Mining Industry Skills Strategy. The report, *Securing the Critical Capability – Towards a holistic skills strategy for the mining industry*, identifies current skilling issues within the mining industry and definitive strategies to ensure the timely development of a highly skilled and sustainable workforce into the future. This report is accessible at <http://www.miskillcentre.com.au>

### **Manufacturing Skills Australia**

In 2007 Manufacturing Skills Australia released *The Manufacturing Industry Skills Report*. This report identifies the drivers of industry skills needs resulting from fewer young people entering the manufacturing workforce, and the consequent need to attract more young people into the industry, including those who would not normally be considered a career in this sector. The report outlines approaches being adopted to address skills shortages in the industry and strategies to achieve a stable, adaptable and responsive manufacturing workforce. Further information can be found about this initiative at <http://www.mskills.com.au>

### **South Australia's Workforce Information Service**

The South Australian Government's Workforce Information Service (WIS) provides useful tools, resources and information to assist workforce planning and development practitioners. Further information can be found about this initiative at <http://www.workforceinfoservice.sa.gov.au>

### **Skills Drilling Mining and Construction (DMC) Industry Skills Council**

Reflecting its concerns over skill shortages, and its nation-wide responsibilities, the Skills DMC Industry Skills Council has undertaken a Coal Workforce Planning Project. This project involves the development of a coal workforce industry model, which forecasts the demand for labour by each occupation, state and type of mine to 2015/16. The model assesses the impact of workforce ageing on labour supply, and includes the formulation of a separate workforce planning tool, which can be used by mine operators to estimate their workforce needs across their mining operations. Although this initial project focuses on the coal sector, it is envisaged that workforce models will also be developed for the other four industry sectors covered by the DMC Industry Skills Council, namely metalliferous mining, civil construction, construction materials and drilling sectors. Further information about this initiative is available at <http://www.skillsdmc.com.au/Workforce-Planning/default.aspx>.

## **Standards Australia – Handbook on Workforce Planning**

Standards Australia is recognised by the Government as Australia’s peak standards body. It develops Australian Standards® of public benefit and national interest. Standards Australia, through its Human Resources and Employment Committee (MB-009), identified Workforce Planning as rapidly emerging as a discrete specialist discipline and an essential element in the achievement of business strategies and corporate objectives. The Committee has produced a *Handbook on Workforce Planning* designed for use by all size businesses, industry peak bodies, government, organisations and associations. For further information, please refer to <http://www.standards.org.au>.

## **Wise Employment**

The Wise Employment philosophy is to provide quality assistance to as many individuals as possible, so that they may realise their potential. In pursuit of its philosophy, Wise provides comprehensive training and retraining for jobseekers and for their employers. Wise Employment has grown to become one of the largest specialist disability employment services in Australia and one of the nation’s leading JobNetwork providers. Further details about this initiative are available at <http://www.wiseemployment.com.au>

## **Workforce Development Consortium**

The Workforce Development Research Consortium is a research collaboration that builds on the substantial labour market knowledge base and analytical capacity of the three South Australian public universities: the University of Adelaide; Flinders University; and the University of South Australia. This consortium provides expert advice on the implications of demographic change and ageing for workforce development and planning in South Australia and aims to build a world-class research capacity in this field. The consortium has been commissioned by the South Australian Government to undertake three workforce development related and policy projects: (1) Workforce Planning Tools and Practitioners; (2) High Performance Workplaces: Developing Standards and Reporting Tools; and (3) Mapping the Lifecycle Experiences of Men and Women in the Labour Market. Further information is available at <http://www.workforceinfoservice.sa.gov.au/workforcedev/researchconsortium>

# **3. TRAINING, DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER PATH PLANNING STRATEGIES**

While many companies start their workforce planning with recruitment, it is also essential to take into account the fact that you already have employees. Your existing workforce is your greatest asset and it makes sense to invest time and money in continuing to develop that workforce.

Training and development can play a critical role in attracting and retaining your workforce. Training can also be an essential tool for maintaining and improving the productivity of your staff and the relevance of their skills to your business, your clients’ needs and ever-changing industry standards. Given the ongoing shortages of labour and skills, all companies should be taking action to reduce the impact of staff scarcity by training the people they already employ.

Development opportunities motivate staff by providing them with skill and knowledge enrichment. At the same time, a better skilled, more motivated workforce will help boost your business competitiveness, improve productivity and increase your profit margin.

### 3.1 Supporting Apprenticeships & Traineeships

Traditional apprenticeships are a well established means by which businesses can develop and support skills within their workplace and industry. Apprenticeships typically involve 3-4 years of on/off-the-job training. Upon completion, the apprentice will be a qualified tradesperson capable of working at a high skill level within their occupation.

Apprenticeships are a critical training pathway in all advanced economies and Government actively supports them. There are many subsidies and support arrangements in place to help employers take on apprentices and keep them employed while they work towards their qualification.

Traineeships are generally of a shorter duration than apprenticeships and cover a wide range of (non-trade) occupations. They can be found in a diverse range of industries including hospitality, business administration, and information technology industries. They generally run for a period of 12-24 months and also include on/off-the-job training.

The off-the-job component of training for both apprentices and trainees is delivered through registered training organisations ensuring the highest quality of training delivery.

There are many subsidies and support arrangements in place for apprenticeships and traineeships to assist employers. Further information about apprenticeships and traineeships can be found at <http://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au> and <http://training.com.au>.

As the following case studies attest, recruiting and training an apprentice is a long-term solution to your skill needs.

#### **Case Study: Industrial Conveying Australia**

##### ***Achieving high apprentice retention rates in critical trades with well-defined career paths***

Formed in 1979, Industrial Conveying Australia specialises in materials handling, transporting raw materials, processed materials and finished products for a diverse range of manufacturing industries. It employs approximately 200 people nationally, mostly project managers, engineers, tradespeople and designers. For the past 25 years the company has had a strong commitment to apprenticeships, for which completion and retention rates have exceeded 90 per cent. Many of its apprentices have progressed to impressive career paths within the company.

##### ***Winning loyalty with clearly-defined career paths is essential***

Most potential candidates for apprenticeships are at the start of their careers, and many are weighing the costs and benefits of an apprenticeship against those of a university degree. Clearly defined career paths are essential to finding and retaining good staff. It is important for good candidates to know there is a job for them at the end of their apprenticeship, and more than that, a well-defined career path, that will enable them to pursue goals like supporting a family in the future, awaits them.

Production manager Klaus Frank notes that:

“Three of our Senior Project Managers began their apprenticeship with us, making the transition to a tradesperson, to a leading hand, senior leading hand and now Project Managers in their own right, each managing multi-million dollar projects.”

### *Apprentices appreciate variety*

One of the most important factors contributing to Industrial Conveying's success is the variety of work that the company is able to offer to apprentices. Because of the nature of its work, apprentices and tradespeople are able to work on different sites and servicing for different industries. This variety contributes to job satisfaction, encourages leadership, exposes the apprentices to a variety of different skills and encourages them to take pride in their work.

"Our apprentices are initially assigned to a particular trades team and then every three months for the duration of their apprenticeship they are rotated to a different trades team. This way they see a wide range of techniques and learn in different environments."

*Don't overlook mature-age candidates and those with disabilities*

While mature-age candidates and those with disabilities are often more challenging for the company than young, able-bodied apprentices, people from these groups can add to the atmosphere and workplace culture of a company's workforce, as well as being highly motivated and effective workers. It just means you may have to invest a little more time and effort with them at the start.

*Actively promote your apprenticeships program – get involved!*

The success of their recruitment program has come from making themselves a highly visible employer of choice.

Klaus notes that "There's a whole industry out there designed to help you with your training and recruitment challenges. My advice is to consult widely to promote your apprenticeships program, identify potential new partners and gather information. Speak to local TAFE and secondary schools, careers advisors and networks, Australian Apprenticeships Centres, Job Network or local employment agencies, Registered Training Organisations, and others. Engaging in focus groups with youth, parents and education representatives can also be useful in helping you target your program to the available labour supply. Other strategies include creating promotional material, such as posters, highlighting the key features of your apprenticeship program that your target audience will most appreciate. Arrange for site visits from the local secondary schools and any interested parties – advertise them through the school careers department, newsletter and on-line. Remember that if you aren't actively pursuing and wooing your future workforce, your competitors will be."

Industrial Conveying has been working closely with the Australian Industry Group, the local Catholic College and TAFE for years and is now reaping the rewards. Industrial Conveying co-ordinates site visits with the secondary school and showcases the business at the school's annual 'careers fest'. It also tries to involve itself more directly with the students, by making staff available to participate in students' assignments for subjects such as Safety Awareness.

Industrial Conveying has developed a particularly good relationship with the TAFE fabrication department, and as a result, Industrial Conveying is even able to have some influence in the course curriculum, helping to tailor the course to the company's requirements. It has also benefited from a constructive working relationship with the Australian Technical College in Bendigo. Its school-based apprenticeships program has been highly successful in attracting young students, allowing them to begin their apprenticeship by working at Industrial Conveying every fourth week while undertaking Year 11 and 12 in the other three weeks. Students love it, because they are earning money and learning practical skills without sacrificing their VCE. At the end of year 12, they can go straight into the second year of their apprenticeship.

Industrial Conveying's apprenticeship program has had so much success that it's almost overflowing with new apprentices, with internal training resources strained to the limit. Production manager Klaus Frank is not concerned: already starting to get great results, he sees it as an effective long-term planning model, which will really pay dividends in 4-5 years time.

### **Case Study: Riviera School-based Apprenticeships Program**

#### ***Building school - company relationships has allowed Riviera, an innovative boat builder, to meet its trade and technical skill needs***

This case study showcases a company that has proactively engaged with school students and school leavers to gain a strong ongoing supply of motivated recruits.

Riviera is one of the largest employers of apprentices in Queensland with more than 160 young people currently employed as apprentices. Its world-class training facility at Coomera on the Gold Coast has pioneered several innovative training initiatives.

#### *The program*

The Riviera school-based apprenticeship program was established in 1996, to provide Year 11 and 12 students with career opportunities and to further build the apprentice base of Riviera. Since then, the program has expanded and Riviera now employs around 50 school-based apprentices as part of the 160 strong apprenticeship program.

Riviera offers eight different apprenticeship options including a range of four-year apprenticeships resulting in a Certificate III outcome in:

- boatbuilding;
- electrical installation;
- marine installation;
- cabinetmaking;
- timber machining;
- timber finishing;
- upholstery; and
- composite technician.

These apprenticeships cover most of the trades in the boatbuilding industry.

The implementation of the program involved:

#### *Recruitment*

The scheme commences with Year 11 students at local Secondary Schools being advised of the opportunity to apply for apprenticeships, through information nights at Riviera's factory provided for interested students and parents. Students are then asked to supply applications and resumes, which are subsequently assessed by a Riviera selection panel. Successful candidates get to attend the Riviera complex one day a week during their fourth term of Year 11.

#### *School-based training*

Upon commencement of Year 12, apprenticeship contracts are signed and all students are placed on the Riviera payroll at first-year apprentice rates. All students work one day a week at Riviera and attend their respective schools the other four days (with a prerequisite to pass at a satisfactory level in their regular subjects). Training is carried out in the Riviera training facility during school holidays and on single days throughout the year.

The school-based training program feeds into a traditional full-time apprenticeship arrangement. On completion of Year 12 the apprentices become full-time apprentices and continue their vocation with Riviera.

#### *The full-time apprenticeship program*

First, second, third and fourth year apprentices spend one day a week in the training facility within the Riviera complex and the other four days on the factory floor. Apprentices rotate around the factory to broaden their skills, spending time in the fibreglass moulding areas, general fit-out, research and development and final fit-out.

#### *Government co-operation*

Riviera has noted the importance of consulting with relevant government bodies in implementing its apprenticeships program, in particular the Department of Education, Department of Employment and Training (DET) and the Queensland Apprenticeship Services (QAS). DET assists in management issues as well as conflict and discipline issues, while the QAS assists in the signing up of apprentices and monitors incentive payments and other administrative issues.

#### *Success of the program*

The apprenticeships program is an essential part of Riviera's labour supply strategy, with an emphasis on transferring skills and values important to the company and the individual. According to Riviera Chief Executive, Wes Moxey:

"Riviera places a high priority on its training, is totally committed to its workforce and extends its skills training into life coaching and encouraging workers to become high achievers and model citizens. We have a philosophy of learning for life and we do everything in our power to ensure that all our employees are given every opportunity to enhance their skills and progress up the career ladder."

## **3.2 Staff Development as a Means of Retention**

### **Case Study: Boral**

'The Australian Construction Materials Human Resources Strategy'

#### ***Attracting and retaining key and high calibre staff***

A key platform of Boral's Australian Construction Materials human resources strategy in the Victoria/Tasmania region is to ensure that staff attraction and retention initiatives are in place. The attraction of high calibre employees in all fields of endeavour, and the maintenance of low levels of staff turnover, is fundamental to business success. Stability in their skill and talent level is essential to ensure productivity levels are improved, that product quality is assured and the confidence of the customer base is maintained.

#### *Identifying and rewarding emerging leaders and the graduate program*

A group of emerging leaders has been identified within the region, including high potential employees with the capability for development as future senior managers or those holding positions where there is a high degree of influence over key operations. It was recognised that the ability of the business to grow from a values and skill perspective was dependent on the strength of this group. Accordingly, the turnover level of these emerging leaders also needed to be kept low. There was agreement from all general managers in the region that

this group is a shared resource critical to Boral's overall performance. Accordingly, specific training and activities have been organised for this group by the regional HR group.

A subset of the emerging leader group is the graduate pool. Activities in the region have focused on experiences as broad and varied as possible during the first two and half years. After completing an appraisal with their manager, the individual's progress is reviewed by the Manager, Human Resources to ensure that development needs are being met and, importantly, that sufficient challenge and stretch is being provided. Mid-year salary increases provide formal reinforcement of performance. Networking opportunities with the immediate peer group and general managers is also provided outside regular meetings of the wider emerging leader group. During the first two year period, the group will attend the emerging leader forum and enrol in the Certificate IV in Frontline Management program.

Central to the success of the program has been the commitment of the Regional General Manager to conduct annual reviews of the turnover and churn in the business to ascertain the number of graduates the business will recruit year-on-year to sustain the program.

### *Coaching as a Retention Strategy*

It is estimated that the cost of turnover can vary between 30% and 150% of salary. Direct costs associated with turnover include recruiting fees, interview time, reference checking, salary differential and medical testing. It is however, the indirect costs which are unmeasured or not taken into account – lost productivity from disaffected staff, co-workers and supervisors, the vacancy period and time spent by replacement staff on the learning curve.

There is a greater impact in losing employees from the emerging leader group who are being 'groomed' for senior management roles. The learning curve investment by the company has been substantial and the impact of loss from this group is even greater. The void created by departing people, in terms of the lost experience required for succession planning to be effective, can result in a failure to find a suitable internal candidate as the gap to the next wave of graduate appointments can be too great. In this context, retention strategies become critical.

Coaching is seen as an important method of instilling a strong performance-based culture throughout Boral's hierarchical levels. The initial group of trained coaches has grown to approximately twenty five across the region since the implementation of the program. Targeted participants of the coaching program are graduates, emerging leaders and employees in key roles who exert influence over others in their operation. Recent feedback from coached staff has indicated the program provides valuable personal development. It is well understood in the firm that coaching is a high level factor contributing to the retention of employees, and commitment by the senior management team has been important in sustaining this initiative.

### **Case Study: Stockland**

#### ***Mentoring and knowledge creation***

The '3in3 Program' has been implemented by Stockland with the aim of encouraging creativity and innovation in the organisation's workforce, through team projects and mentoring, in order to capture and apply the learning outcomes.

#### *How does it work?*

Stockland employees have the opportunity to apply and work with a different area of Stockland for a minimum of 3 days over a 3 month period.

As part of the planning process, employees identify one or two possible areas of interest for professional growth, including possible mentors, who are aligned to their career aspirations.

The program focuses on optimising employee productivity through gaining experiences across the organisation and is designed to encourage cross-company experiences for Stockland employees. It is arranged to provide structured professional learning through spending time with an experienced employee in another part of Stockland. The program is designed to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the key functions of different areas, and a chance to broaden and develop employee skills.

*Who can apply?*

Any full time Stockland employee who has worked for Stockland for a period of 6 months or longer is eligible to apply for the 3in3 Program. To be considered for the program an employee needs to have completed a development plan signed off by their manager. There are no limits as to how many employees can participate.

## **4. ADDRESSING SKILL SHORTAGES**

With many occupations and skills currently being in critical short supply, employers are increasingly implementing a range of strategies to meet their workforce requirements. This section outlines some relevant approaches in this regard, including:

- the upskilling and multi-skilling of existing workers;
- attracting younger workers;
- encouraging the participation of mature age workers; and
- establishing strategic partnerships between industry and the education/training sectors.

### **4.1 Upskilling and Multi-skilling**

Your existing workforce is your most valuable resource. Upskilling and multi-skilling existing employees is therefore the primary and most important skill strategy for your company, alongside such strategies as attempting to attract younger and mature age workers and those who may be disadvantaged in the labour market.

### **4.2 Attracting Younger Workers**

Younger workers, in the 15 to 24 year age group, have varying work intentions, with some looking for holiday employment, some seeking part-time work while studying at high school, TAFE, college or university, and others seeking full time employment, an apprenticeship or traineeship.

With the ageing of the workforce, competition for young workers and new entrants to the workforce is becoming fierce. And this competition is not just amongst employers but includes universities and TAFE Colleges, too, scrambling for students.

There has been a lot of research about younger workers, which indicates that they are typically more ambitious and mobile than older workers and they don't have a strong concept of a 'job for life'.

Strategies that employers can implement to accelerate the development of younger workers include:

- Providing them with the chance to stay in school while working, designing their job around school hours;
- Supporting them to pursue other forms of education, such as TAFE, distance education and on-the-job training, that might help both employer and employee; and

- Exploring traineeship, cadetships and apprenticeships so that careers can be pursued while still studying for those who want to acquire recognised skills and earn a wage at the same time.

### 4.3 Mature Age Trainees

The following case study about Stepping Stones Children's Services highlights how recruiting from a broad source of labour supply, including mature age people wishing to return to the workforce as well as younger trainees, in combination with a strong investment in training can ensure a steady supply of motivated employees.

#### **Case Study: Stepping Stones Children's Services**

##### ***Stepping stones to success – Valuing the potential of older workers'***

Stepping Stones Children's Services has grown consistently since it began operations in 1996, with a recruitment policy based on building loyalty through targeting jobseekers who other employers might overlook, and through a commitment to training.

Stepping Stones opened up with six staff, including two trainees, and six children in care on the first day. Eleven years later it has 55 staff, has trained a total of 44 trainees and cares for over 600 children a day. Over the past 10 years more than 95 percent of its trainees have completed their traineeship with the organisation, a strong contributing factor to it receiving the 2006 Minister's Award for Excellence for Employers of Australian Apprentices in the Tasmanian region.

##### *Breaking down the barriers of age and gender*

Stepping Stones prides itself in breaking down barriers of age and gender in the employment of its trainees. CEO Chantal Williams acknowledges the strong temptation to use young trainees with lower age-based wages, having been guilty of this herself in the early days. She quickly learned, however, to concentrate on selecting "the right person for the job" regardless of age or gender. She also appreciated the importance of treating trainees as important members of staff from the moment they enter the door, regardless of their age or experience. She currently employs four male child carers, and has employed several female trainees who have returned to the workforce after up to 20 years at home caring for their own families.

Stepping Stones' experience combats the misconception that traineeships are only for young people. When advertising traineeships, Chantal makes it clear that there is no age limit, emphasising that positions will be granted on merit and not age.

##### *Make good use of Government subsidies*

"Due to the Government's incentive payments we receive, we are able to employ people returning to the workforce who are in their 40s and 50s with valuable life experience and maturity. It also helps keep our training costs low". All employees are encouraged to undergo further training, especially if they aspire to management or senior positions, and the company offers "time off the floor" and financial assistance to pursue additional training.

The company had developed a strong relationship with the Australian Apprenticeships Centre (through which the Government administers its incentive payments), and this has helped to cut through the paperwork maze, with the centre handling sign ups, incentive payments, completions and other issues that arise.

*Don't run away from challenges*

When Stepping Stones started, it found that the existing training arrangements did not provide it with the skills it required, and so came up with their own solution – it developed its own training program:

*"Our business is very unique in that it has its own in-house Registered Training Organisation, 'Stepping Ahead Training and Development,' with a full time training officer on site available to all trainees."*

Developing an RTO from scratch, was an incredibly daunting process. Chantal describes "extensive audits that left you feeling like a 'train wreck' and enormous paperwork." But the pain was ultimately worthwhile, with Stepping Ahead Training and Development giving the company access to quality, well-trained staff. Beyond that, the training company has now become a business in its own right, offering training services to other companies seeking innovative training solutions – a great success story!

#### **4.4 Strategic Partnerships between Industry and the Education and Training Sectors**

Queensland Build and Block has targeted the creation of apprenticeship opportunities through establishing strategic partnerships with industry and education sectors.

##### **Case Study: Queensland 'Build and Block' Program**

##### ***Creating more apprenticeships to tackle an ageing, shrinking bricklayer workforce***

Concern about the ageing brick- and block-laying workforce led by David Ede, an experienced block manufacturer in North Queensland, to spearhead an innovative industry-funded project designed to boost the number of apprentices and promote bricklaying as a genuine career option for enthusiastic students. The Australian Brick and Block Laying Training Foundation (ABBTF) was formed by all of the major Brick and Block Manufacturers in Australia to co-ordinate, fund and promote Step Out (Try a Trade) Programs in schools, Prevocational Courses at TAFE's and source apprenticeships from the outcomes in Bricklaying.

David Ede was recently recognised by Rotary International for his work with apprentices by being awarded a Paul Harris Fellow Award.

##### *Chronic skills loss*

In 2005, the bricklaying trade was confronted with some alarming statistics about its workforce in Australia. Annual losses of 10% of the workforce (due to retirement and career change) were only being offset by a 2.5% gain in new entrants; the average bricklayer was 51 years old; and Queensland alone had a shortfall of 600 brick- and block- laying apprentices. Industrial stakeholders were naturally concerned by the ageing and rapidly diminishing workforce. So David Ede and his ABBTF colleagues set out to develop the 'Build and Block Training' program, funded solely by industry, to encourage apprenticeships in Brick- and Block-laying.

##### *A strategy based on industry funding and intensive school placements*

With the approval of the ACCC established businesses relying heavily on brick- and block-layers were asked to levy a small percentage of their profits to create a fund for training apprentices. These funds were to be spent primarily on training itself (85%), with the remaining 15% to be spent on advertising and marketing to inform students about the benefits of a bricklaying apprenticeship and how to participate in the program.

The program involved three formal stages:

1. School-based 'step-outs';
2. A 15-week intensive skills program run through local TAFE and Registered Training Organisations;
3. Apprenticeship placements with local tradespeople.

Each of these stages is described below.

*1. School-based 'step-outs':*

'Step-outs' are practical 5-day school-based programs designed to promote the bricklaying trade, in which a class of 14 students is taught to lay bricks and given the opportunity to apply these skills in a practical setting which involves building a small structure in the school. At the end of the 5 days, the best 3 to 5 students are offered the opportunity to continue into the second phase of the program.

*2. 15-week Intensive Skills program:*

The best 4 or 5 students from phase 1 undergo 15 weeks of intensive training in brick- and block-laying at TAFE or RTO institutions, funded by the apprenticeships fund. The students are really pushed hard over the 15 weeks to ensure that they can lay 70 blocks or 200 bricks a day by the end of the intensive period, making them ready for the challenge of their apprenticeship.

*3. Apprenticeship placements:*

Phases 1 and 2 are designed to provide employers with ready-made students completely ready to undertake their apprenticeships. Successful students are placed with local tradespeople for a 3-month probationary period, before progressing to years 42 months of their apprenticeship. In other words, phases 1 and 2 of the Build and Block program fast-track the students, in lieu of up to the first 9 months of the apprenticeship depending on their skill.

The fund also provides financial incentives (up to \$8000) in some states for participating employers, delivering tried and tested apprentices at a low cost.

*Successes and Achievements*

Over the 2 years for which the program has been running, the number of new brick- and block-laying apprentices in the area North of Rockhampton has increased from 9 to 40 per annum. The program has just recently processed 72 high school students in the Mackay region, 78 new high school students in Townsville and 105 in Cairns and far North Queensland. Overall, the number of new bricklaying apprentices in Queensland has increased from 237 in 2005 to 469, fast approaching the equilibrium target of 800 by the end of 2009. Furthermore, the program's Queensland model has recently been expanded into New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia, Tasmania and South Australia, making it a truly national initiative, and a clear success.

## 5. STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS AN AGEING WORKFORCE

There is widespread concern across Australian industry about the impact of an ageing workforce on the nation's productivity and economic performance. Australian companies are starting to adopt a range of interrelated strategies to address this issue including: succession planning, initiatives to retain mature age employees, flexible retirement, mentoring programs and knowledge retention/transfer strategies. This section highlights some of these strategies.

### 5.1 Knowledge Retention

#### **Case Study: Alcoa WA Mining - Technical Group**

#### ***Knowledge retention initiatives to counter the impact of an ageing technical workforce***

##### *The knowledge retention strategy*

The major aim of the knowledge retention strategy was to better understand the relationship between the operational and organisational needs of Alcoa's WA Mining Technical Group and the potential impact of the knowledge loss from retiring employees.

##### *A sense of urgency*

This project was triggered by the concerns of Alcoa of Australia (one of the largest aluminium producers in the world) about the loss of key skills within its WA mining operations as veterans started to consider their retirement options. Company management realised that they had very little information about their employees' intentions and the issues driving their decision-making. The company felt a sense of urgency in retaining the knowledge held by their ageing workforce and in developing ways to retain and transfer that knowledge to younger personnel through the development of a phased retirement program.

The strategy involved a combination of knowledge retention initiatives and the introduction of a phased retirement program.

##### *Involving staff in planning to address critical skill gaps*

Initially, employees were invited to participate in a planning workshop and respond to a questionnaire covering a range of issues relating to work and the transition to retirement.

Participating employees, both those about to retire or considering retirement, and younger workers who face the prospect of losing their supervisors and the skilled technicians to whom they refer problems and seek mentoring and advice, are equally concerned.

For younger employees the prospect of losing their "touch stones", their sources of corporate knowledge, is very real and immediate.

##### *Knowledge Retention Workshops*

The participants explored the potential impact on the company should it lose its key employees over a compressed time period. These views were then further canvassed at a subsequent planning day with the entire operations team including younger workers who will have to take over the leadership reins. This in turn led to the establishment of a regular program of planning workshops which have resulted in the development a knowledge retention strategy for the group and interactive planning arrangements which have changed the workplace culture of the mining operation.

At these more specific workshops the first step was to identify the activities of the employees in the three operational groups of the mine. The next step was to determine priority processes in their business activity, in other words what are the most critical aspects of their roles and where do the greatest risks to the mine reside from the anticipated knowledge loss.

#### *A Knowledge Filtering Process*

The project has now progressed to a stage where a consultant is working with several employees - who have confirmed their intentions to retire - to develop a "knowledge-filtering tool". This tool seeks to match the employees' knowledge to the business and operational imperatives of the mine.

When completing the process the employee considers what it would be like for a new person in their job if they decided to leave the mine at short notice and there was no handover of their role. In other words, what knowledge do they hold that the new person would need?

This process has helped determine what intangible knowledge an individual has, that if lost or not transferred would have impeded the effectiveness, efficiency and therefore performance of the mine.

This process has been facilitated by a consultant, documented and provided to the Mine Manager, and has resulted in older employees being given new roles on a part-time basis, to facilitate a phased retirement rather than an abrupt departure.

## **5.2 Phased Retirement**

### **Case Study: Australian Railroad Group**

#### ***Planning ahead to manage an ageing workforce***

The Australian Railroad Group's (ARG) Phased Retirement Program aims to enable the company to keep for longer its highly valued and skilled staff that are approaching retirement. It does this through finding out about their retirement intentions and any related work issues they have and introducing more flexible employment arrangements to address those issues. In other words, the program aims to make it easier for these employees to keep working but on a shorter hours basis.

#### *Identifying retirement intentions*

Initially when this program commenced in July 2005, ARG designed it to capture information about locomotive drivers and their retirement intentions. With the assistance of a workforce planning expert, the company's first task was a scoping exercise to provide ARG management with information about the views of those locomotive drivers nearing traditional retirement age.

#### *Involving workers*

A focus group comprising seven ARG drivers was established, to provide input into the design and content of a questionnaire for the broader locomotive driver workforce. This added significantly to the credibility of the questionnaire, the relevance of the questions and the participation of their colleagues.

### *The ARG Phased Retirement Questionnaire*

The survey was then distributed to a group of over 200 locomotive drivers aged 50 and over in depots in Western Australia, South Australia and New South Wales. The results of the survey confirmed suspicions that there were a significant number of employees intending to retire within two to five years, with potentially chaotic implications.

### *Tailoring work arrangements to suit workers' pre-retirement needs*

Responding locomotive drivers identified that the rostering system was the greatest hurdle to implementing phased retirement options, and there was overwhelming support for the introduction of a roster that better suited their own pre-retirement circumstances. This flexible approach to rosters included greater opportunities for casual and part-time work and job-sharing.

A structured program was designed along these lines, with accompanying information packages addressing such matters as outlining what an employee needs to do to access the program, and what phased retirement options are available. There has been a lot of interest by locomotive drivers in phasing out of their full-time roles more gradually, resulting in a much more manageable challenge, and one which maintains company productivity, and one which assists in achieving company productivity.

ARG management has thrown their full support behind the program and has decided to extend the program across its network of depots. This next step involves sending a representative from the Human Resources unit and the consultant assisting with the program on a tour of the depots to conduct workshops and identify any additional issues - relating to rostering, other HR issues that arise, and issues of relevance to the company's wider workforce.

### *Overcoming other hurdles to maximising the retention of ageing employees*

This process has also highlighted the desire by employees for the company to run other workshops covering the issues that older workers are facing as they near retirement. Topics include planning for the lifestyle issues that arise in making the transition from work to retirement, financial planning, advice on Centrelink services and nutrition. The workshops gave the opportunity for retiring ARG locomotive drivers to give their personal insights into how they are dealing with retirement, in addition to leaving behind a valuable legacy of knowledge about the company.

### *Knowledge retention*

A more recent survey of the non-driver workforce identified many similar issues and has progressed in a similar manner as the locomotive driver project.

In particular, the engineers who participated in these workshops identified the risk to the company's operations in the loss of their knowledge as they retire. Given this, a proposal to conduct an ARG 'knowledge retention' pilot for rolling stock services has been developed for consideration by management, to ensure that ARG holds onto the critical knowledge held by employees making the transition from full time work to retirement. The company has recognised the importance of acting quickly to keep the intellectual property held by these veterans with ARG.

## 6. SUPPORTING THE WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION OF UNDER-REPRESENTED AND DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

### 6.1 Local Indigenous People

#### Case Study: Argyle Diamond Mine

##### ***Creating workforce availability by targeting the recruitment of local Indigenous Australians***

The following case study of the Argyle Diamond Mine demonstrates the benefits of making the employment of local Indigenous people the central workforce solution.

The Argyle Diamond Mine, south of Kununurra, accounts for about one quarter of the world's natural diamond production. When the mine was first developed, management made a commitment to provide employment opportunities for local Aboriginal people in the region, as an act of goodwill towards local communities. However, for the most part, this commitment was numerically quite small.

The first intake of Aboriginal workers numbered 14 in 1985, accounting for 2.5% of the workforce. After fluctuating during the 1990's, that commitment has grown since 1999, following the company's decision to source a greater proportion of its workforce from Aboriginal communities within the regions.

With the introduction of company plans to enhance Aboriginal employment at the mine (partly as commitment to the region and Aboriginal landowners, and partly as a strategy to ensure that the mine had an ongoing adequate supply of labour), the numbers have steadily increased. And they are now poised to grow even more rapidly.

The Mine has adopted a workforce strategy involving a rapid winding back of the fly-in-fly-out workers workforce to just 20-30% with the bulk of the workforce being sourced from the broader local region, and with 40% to be made up of Aboriginal people.

To recruit locally, Argyle Diamonds has had to create innovative recruitment and training practices as the mainstream practices being used were making it too difficult for Indigenous people to gain employment. The strategy also focuses on the employment of significant numbers of apprentices.

Ray Chamberlain, Argyle's Superintendent Community Relations and Work Readiness, explained, "Recruiting apprentices to work at the Argyle mine site in Western Australia's remote East Kimberley region involves much more than posting a job advert in the local paper. Supervisors at the world's largest diamond mine also regularly hit the open road in search of potential apprentices."

This is necessary because of the company's focus on recruiting and upskilling members of the local community, many of whom are indigenous and live in isolated areas.

Of Argyle's 800 employees, about 400 live in the Kimberley region. There are currently 31 apprentices, of whom 24 are indigenous. Another 32 indigenous trainees will have the opportunity to progress to undertaking a full apprenticeship after 18 months.

"Every few months a couple of us throw our swags in the four wheel drive and set out to meet with local families and discuss the opportunities we can offer young kids," Ray Chamberlain, Argyle's Superintendent Community Relations and Training, explained.

"We travel from Broome, to Kalumburu, Halls Creek and the WA/NT border in search of possible New Apprentices and Trainees. Then we get them in for a four-day workshop to see if they like living and working in a mining community, and assess their level of commitment.

"We get a pretty good response because Argyle is fairly well known in the region and people are aware that we are committed to putting something back into the community by training locals."

Argyle has been taking on apprentices for about 20 years in a diverse range of trades, including heavy machinery, mechanical, mining, carpentry, boilermaking, welding and electrics, as well as business and tourism. Between 2003 and 2007, Argyle increased its commitment to taking on 30 new apprentices or trainees each year.

Selected participants take part in a six-week induction program run on-site and at Kununurra TAFE, giving them accredited skills in hand and power tools, occupational health and safety, computing, literacy and numeracy.

"Argyle is looking to benefit the whole of the Kimberley region. There's a shortage of skilled tradespeople in Australia, so if we can skill up locals we are reducing the need to source people from elsewhere," Mr Chamberlain said.

Argyle's commitment to apprentices and trainees extends far beyond the workplace. Mr Chamberlain and his team are often on-call 24-hours a day to work with apprentices and trainees and their families if any personal issues arise. The effort has paid off, as the company has only lost two apprentices since 2003.

"Argyle really makes an effort to help the young people, empower them and give them a sense of self worth. That is reflected in the loyalty shown by the apprentices.

"Their retention rate is really impressive and Argyle commits to keeping them gainfully employed after they complete their apprenticeships."

It's a truly lighthouse project.

## **6.2 Disadvantaged Youth**

### **Case Study: Restaurant and Catering NSW – 'Fish on Fridays'**

#### ***A recruitment strategy based on providing career tasting opportunities for disadvantaged youth***

##### *Innovative recruitment strategies*

Innovative industry-based strategies to boost recruitment and retention of key staff and apprentices are becoming more common in an environment of critical skill shortages.

Armed with support from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations' Employment Innovation Fund in 2004, the Restaurants and Caterers NSW (R & C NSW) and its Chief Executive Officer, Robert Goldman embarked on a project reminiscent of Jamie Oliver's '15'. Named 'Fish on Friday's', the program was designed to meet a number of objectives:

- To help fill gaps in recruiting suitable staff for the restaurant and catering industry to address industry shortages in the Sydney metropolitan region;
- To assist unemployed people, particularly young, long-term unemployed and Indigenous job seekers, who are keen and enthusiastic to get a foothold in the industry;
- To provide recognised training and experience in restaurant operations to enable the successful placement into paid employment.

## *Implementation*

Key aspects of the program involved:

- Liaising with local Job Network members to facilitate the referral of jobseekers to the training program;
- Providing participants with hands-on experience two days a week at *Fish on Friday plus Thursday Too* at Forrester's Bar and Restaurant in inner-Sydney suburb Surry Hills; and
- Facilitating two day's work experience in an operating restaurant for each participant.

### *A combination of internal and external training*

To implement the program, R & C NSW has established an internal training department of 2 to 3 employees as well 2 accredited trainers for each program. The external trainers are of great benefit to the program, both highly competent and available as needed. Reflecting present staff shortages, the restaurants are very cooperative and keen to be involved.

### *The importance of emotional support*

Robert Goldman notes that mentoring is the most important thing when dealing with disadvantaged youth:

"I cannot stress enough the importance of mentoring when dealing with disenfranchised youth". Most do not have a good work ethic, and can be dysfunctional. So, it is known that they 'won't walk away as a chef after two weeks' but the emphasis, especially initially, is on mentoring and building their self respect and confidence more than on skill development. "The skills and commitment will follow."

### *Make good use of local Job Networks*

After initially trying to source candidates through multiple Job Network members, who ended up being difficult and confusing, R & C NSW now worked with just one Job Network member. Working with just one caseworker has made the process more efficient and effective.

### *Results and Achievements*

'Fish on Friday's' has been very successful program to date. In 2004, R & C NSW ran 10 programs as a demonstration project in Sydney while in 2005 it conducted an additional 4 programs in regional New South Wales and 3 in metropolitan Sydney and Newcastle. In 2007, it has already run 3 Fish on Fridays, and a 4<sup>th</sup> is scheduled before the end of November.

Trainees completing the program achieve overall employment rates of 65-70%. Helping troubled and disadvantaged members of the community to enter the workforce is a challenge, but the results of R & C NSW's innovative program should provide encouragement to other employers who seek to enhance their workforce while helping the community.

## 6.3 Mature Age and Disadvantaged Job Seekers

### Case Study: Logan Employment Innovation Fund

#### **Meeting workforce needs through targeting recruitment effort on mature aged and disadvantaged job seekers**

Logan City Council comprises a large suburban area of Queensland, with a highly disadvantaged population. The total resident population is 167,808, with mature aged (45 - 65) representing 29.5% of the population. Overseas born comprise 24.9% of the population; and reflecting its popularity as a destination for refugees, there are an estimated 161 different cultures represented in Logan.

The Logan Employment Innovation Fund (EIF) Pilot Project is an innovative project focused on the recruitment and workplace requirements of employers in Logan City (Brisbane), with emphasis on assisting mature-aged and humanitarian entrant job seekers to gain employment with participating employers.

*The identified challenges included transport availability and English proficiency*

Many jobseekers had limited English proficiency, requiring post-placement ESL training. Inflexible timetabling resulted in many employees facing the difficult prospect of either continuing to work or attending ESL classes.

In addition, many jobseekers had no access to private transportation, and there was little or no access to public transport in the areas of work.

Many employers were unaware of the number of humanitarian/refugee jobseekers looking for work, and were concurrently considering temporarily sponsoring overseas workers to fill vacancies. This suggested that enhanced communication and dissemination of information to jobseekers and employers might improve employment opportunities and placement rates.

Solutions to these challenges:

*Improving transport by encouraging co-operation between government departments*

Stronger links developed between employers and Government departments resulted in the development of a new transportation service called the Crestmead Job Lift. This is a shared, subsidised taxi service that allows employees in the Crestmead Industrial Estate to travel to and from work. This kind of co-operative project could be implemented on other industrial estates in remote localities, and may have benefits for both attraction and retention of staff.

*Better communication of labour market information*

The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs were enticed to develop a promotional campaign to inform employers about the benefits of hiring humanitarian entrants. This strategy was designed to increase humanitarian entrants' awareness of job opportunities, as well as employers' awareness of the number and availability of humanitarian and refugee job-seekers to fill their skill shortages and gaps.

*The importance of language programs - the Workplace English Language Literacy (WELL) Program*

Humanitarian entrants generally have a strong desire to work, and English is often the only barrier to this. The WELL program offered a basis upon which Logan City Council could work with employers to develop a WELL proposal to address the vocational English needs of culturally and linguistically diverse workers.

*Consult with community-based organisations to find potential employees*

The project coordinator also worked with community-based organisations that assist humanitarian entrants with the settlement process to ensure that such entrants have access to local Job Network providers. This enabled employers to reach potential employees that were otherwise unknown to them.

*Achievements*

The Logan Employment Project was able to provide practical solutions to all three challenges – transport availability, English proficiency and local labour market information - providing innovative, but readily attainable benefits for job-seekers and employers alike.

## **7. FOSTERING A SUPPORTIVE WORK CULTURE**

### **7.1 Integrated approaches**

A supportive work culture can be achieved through integrated approaches to work design with features such as flexible work options, promoting a work-life balance, training and career development opportunities, and employee benefits and initiatives.

#### **Case Study: William Buck**

##### ***Easing shortages of accountants through a supportive culture which boosts staff retention***

Increasing competition for top quality accounting staff in recent years is placing pressure on all accounting firms, including mid-tier firms like William Buck. This company has anticipated and responded to these challenges and opportunities with a number of innovative workforce strategies.

##### *Employer of choice*

Like many companies, William Buck sets out to be an 'employer of choice' for new staff. Cultivating a supportive culture is an essential step toward reaching this objective, one in which professional skills and knowledge are developed alongside a sense of identity and personal wellbeing. Encouraging a work/life balance is also part of William Buck's concept of a supportive culture. William Buck's philosophy is that a supportive culture boosts its capacity to recruit great staff, and encourages staff to stay longer, creating a stable platform for providing exemplary service – and thereby acting to retain valued clients.

##### *Specific strategies to create a supportive culture*

##### *Supporting a healthy balance between work and life to achieve corporate goals*

William Buck encourages workers to develop hobbies and a work/life balance through initiatives like photography workshops, golf lessons and cooking classes. It also has an active social club which encourages staff to socialise regularly at events including the end of year financial party, the 'Rocking Melbourne' event to raise money for breast cancer, the 'Corporate Battle of the Bands', and sporting events like the BRW Corporate Triathlon and the 'Corporate Games'.

##### *Learning for professional and personal development*

William Buck supports further study for staff members in many ways. Its development program, includes training programs, the opportunity to speak with and learn from specialists, the provision of technical training materials and the ability to sit mock exams for

each subject. William Buck also uses its affiliation with the worldwide accounting group AGN to offer secondment and travel opportunities for staff in countries like the USA and the UK.

### *Staff recognition*

William Buck recognises and promotes talent early. James McKeough, for example, was made a partner in the firm after just 5 years there, and at the age of 40 he is now Managing Director of William Buck Adelaide.

In addition to promotion and financial incentives, William Buck has an annual staff function in June recognising the achievements of staff and awarding an Outstanding Achievement Award.

### *Outcomes*

The strongly supportive work culture at William Buck has delivered hugely positive outcomes, ranging from a friendly workplace where employees are happy and productive, and where high quality staff are attracted to join and stay with the William Buck team. These outcomes, highly valued for their inherent benefits, really deliver on the bottom line for William Buck, which now regularly attracts ambitious candidates looking to advance their careers.

## **Case Study: Google**

### ***A generous and creative work culture pays huge dividends***

Google is renowned worldwide for its technological innovation. Something most people do not know, however, is that Google has also developed some innovative workforce management practices.

#### *10 good reasons*

The top 10 reasons to work at Google (paraphrased) are:

1. Being given the opportunity to help.
2. Being a part of something that matters and working on products in which you can believe.
3. Being part of a valued team.
4. Realising that work and play are not mutually exclusive.
5. An employer that loves their employees, and wants them to know it.
6. Appreciating the rewards of being part of the world's leading organiser of information. innovation is in the bloodline.
7. Googlers come from all sorts of backgrounds, and make for interesting cube-mates.
8. Uniting the world - we think, act, and work globally—and appeal to those who want to make the world a better place.
9. Boldly go where no one has gone before. There are hundreds of challenges yet to solve, and your creative ideas matter and are worth exploring.
10. There is such a thing as a free lunch after all. In fact we have them every day: healthy, yummy, and made with love.

This list, complete with clichés and even Star Trek references, would not attract everyone. It does, however, provide a friendly image for the company; Google does not take itself too seriously, and this makes for a stark contrast with many world-class organisations. The most important thing is that it works, helping to attract the nation's top IT graduates every year.

### *An international flavour*

Google also retains many of the benefits of top international organisations, including overseas work and travel opportunities for employees. Google has complexes throughout the United States from Arizona to Washington, as well as in Europe, Asia, South America and Australia. A testament to Google's international flavour is Google's Developer Day, held this year on 31 May 2007. Google Developer Day™ is a global event held across Google offices in ten countries and featuring workshops, keynotes and breakout discussions on Google's software and development tools. Focusing on the theme "Building Blocks for Better Web Applications," Google Developer Day explores innovative uses of Google developer products to create and enhance applications, integrate with Google services and reach millions of users on Google and beyond. In 2007, Google Developer Day started with sessions in Sydney.

### *Fostering creativity*

Work at Google requires exceptional thinking and technical expertise. Google uses a number of strategies specifically to encourage creativity and innovation:

- Google arranges work in small teams to promote spontaneity, creativity and speed.
- Google recognises that any employee might have the next great idea, so they make sure every idea is heard.
- Because great ideas need resources to grow into reality, Google guarantees employees will get the resources they need to turn their ideas and dreams into reality.

### *"20 percent time" - one of Google's most innovative initiatives*

Google engineers all have "20 percent time" in which they're free to pursue projects they're passionate about. This freedom has already produced Google News, Google Suggest, AdSense for Content, and Orkut – products which might otherwise have taken an entire start-up to launch.

### *Using on-line tools to attract employees*

It comes as no surprise that Google uses technology to attract staff. One of its innovations is a series of on-line videos designed to give potential applicants an inside look at Google complexes and work environments throughout the world. ([www.youtube.com/google](http://www.youtube.com/google)). Another is a range of on-line profiles of current staff members complete with photos and questions and answers covering practically everything a new employee would want to know about the company. This is not only a great way to attract new staff; it's also a way of rewarding existing staff for their loyalty and commitment to Google.

### *Creating a work environment that appeals to graduates*

One of Google's aims is to replicate the atmosphere of a university campus to encourage maximum creativity from its most talented young minds. To do this, Google offers a number of benefits to staff such as:

- private medical benefits for employees and their dependents;
- superior superannuation contributions;
- travel accident and life insurance;
- free lunch, snacks and a well-stocked drinks fridge; and
- onsite massage.

The environment is both productive and fun, and Google Sydney has become one of the most sought-after job placements in the market.

### *Internships and graduate programs*

In addition to its unique recruitment, retention and staff development techniques, Google also offers more traditional internships and graduate programs. Google attracts candidates from throughout the country by providing financial assistance to cover the cost of moving, even for short-term internships, and of course, interns and new graduates experience all the benefits offered to full-time Google employees.

### **Case Study: MiniMovers**

#### ***A fresh innovative approach to recruitment and work culture which keeps employees interested***

From a modest beginning in 1985 when Mike O'Hagan started the Mini Movers removal service with only a ute, he now runs a unique logistics empire that crosses state borders, and has a turnover of over \$23 million a year and over 300 employees – all happy and well-fed on firm-provided free breakfasts!

#### *Effective and innovative recruitment and retention policies*

The big lesson from the MiniMovers story is to explore and implement innovative work practices - be flexible; don't be afraid of using unconventional methods. For example, giving staff benefits and experiences such as:

- Paid training, with employees encouraged to choose appropriate training programs and units of competence
- Breakfast each morning
- Free uniform for permanent employees
- Ability to work and study
- Flexible working week with a choice of working days and hours
- A clearly-defined career path
- Up to date, attractive equipment (including trucks)
- Assistance to gain a truck licence
- Opportunity to transfer between different branches, ie Melbourne, Brisbane and Gold Coast
- Fast recruitment – 6 days from application to start for 90% of suitable applicants
- Trial employment period while still working old job
- Saturday job interviews for convenience (in addition to standard week days).

As the above list suggests, Mini Movers takes a fairly unconventional approach to recruitment and work culture. Instead of using oral and written assessments, recruitment is a practical process. Candidates are shown how to move furniture, then asked to repeat the process themselves. They are assessed on three criteria – attitude, physical ability and accuracy in following instructions.

MiniMovers actively targets people with no previous work experience, and allows other staff, as opposed to senior management, to decide who gets the job. A four-week trial period, however, offers both parties a way out.

The MiniMover philosophy for retaining staff is to offer good wages, provide flexibility and fairness in work practices, support a fun, non-threatening environment, with access to training as it is needed.