

Industrial relations – back with a bang

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IPA Employee Voice Hub webinar

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What's Changed?

- Covid dislocation and post covid grumpiness
- Cost of living soaring
- Decline in pay purchasing power
- Job insecurity despite relatively high levels of employment
- Uncertainty about future prospects – AI, robots etc
- Unprecedented support or at least resignation from public regarding strikes
- Unions have more wind in their sails

Employers caught on the hop – ‘WTF?’

- Lack of IR expertise in house – HR not IR
- Loss of muscle memory of how to undertake difficult negotiations
- Who took on the ongoing liaison task? Was the C suite caught unawares?
- Did an upswing in ‘militancy’ come as a surprise?
- Employers themselves under market/income pressure
- Fat cat pay
- Poor employee engagement emphasises role of union as ‘on your side’

What did you do before the war, Daddy?

- Did relations with trade union members and their reps languish
- Were recognised unions taken for granted?
- Was the available machinery used effectively or allowed to atrophy?
- Did employers establish good informal relations with union reps – pick up the phone
- Did employers seek to build trust with union reps and officials
- Did employers make an effort to engage workforce and unions - how much were employees made aware of challenges ahead?

Getting it right

- Make sure the architecture is fit for purpose – e.g. both sides know what is for negotiation, consultation or information
- Make sure architecture operates effectively – e.g. regular meetings, minutes, decisions recorded
- Make sure negotiators are empowered
- Make clear where responsibility for decisions rests – on both sides
- Develop and demonstrate mutual respect and understanding – it's just as hard being a shop steward as it is a manager.

It's never too late to build trust

- Rediscover the benefits of partnership/collaborative working
- Win-Win solutions
- Agreed comms and not point scoring – take the time to explain
- Treat employees like grown ups
- No surprises
- Have process of mediation and problem solving
- Long term commitment
- Training for union and management reps

Thank you

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