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Serving up a Fair Go? Surfacing cultural issues in hospitality employment

By Richard N.S. Robinson
with Olivier Oren & Tyler Riordan



Executive Summary

A survey of hospitality employees working in Australia, administered 'amid-COVID-19' across late 2021 and early 2022 yielded 383 usable responses. The survey sought to understand hospitality industry employee perceptions of their working experiences relative to the five Fairwork Principles: fair contracts, fair pay, fair conditions, fair representation, and fair management. The survey was also administered by international colleagues to hospitality workers in Ireland, Scotland, Norway, Greece, and New Zealand.

The results of all these surveys are remarkably consistent. The Australian sample is reasonably representative in terms of the demographics of the hospitality workforce, although with over 75% of respondents reporting industry tenure of three to 20 years, the sample is biased towards sector stayers rather than those passing through.

Contractually, over 30% of respondents reported no contract nor seeing written terms for their current jobs – and 8% did not receive pay slips. Regarding fair pay, nearly 20% of respondents did not receive minimum pay rates (or were unsure), 46% said there were no pay increase opportunities at their current workplace, and 45% report not receiving their overtime or penalty rate loading entitlements. Nearly 50% of respondents do not get the breaks to which they are entitled.

Respondents feel promotion to manager or supervisor is the only way they can increase their pay. Over 50% of respondents get no rewards beyond basic pay in terms of bonafide benefits common in other industries, rather citing standard industry practice such as free meals, unpaid leave, and free alcohol.

Regarding fair conditions, for seven of the 10 statements relating to mental health and wellbeing and work stresses relating to COVID-19, over 50% of respondents 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with the negative statements. There are gender differences according to these responses, with men generally faring worse in their wellbeing, and women having less faith than men in customers and employers helping to improve their wellbeing. The evidence shows that workers become more resilient over time according to industry tenure, but that employment status does not consistently affect wellbeing factors.

Over 55% of the sample worked through COVID-19, but nearly 10% of respondents say that they are unlikely to return to hospitality work. Respondents averaged a 50-50 confidence level in customers and employers observing, or providing, the resources for them to feel safe at work post-COVID-19.

Respondents report an institutionalisation of abuse in the hospitality industry, with over 60% experiencing verbal/psychological, bullying, or sexual harassment and over 70% having witnessed verbal/psychological, bullying, sexual harassment and/or racial abuse. Customers, at over 50%, are reported as the main perpetrators of abuse, although 42% of respondents say the abuse comes from their managers/supervisors.

There were generally low levels of confidence that hospitality employees' voices would be heard, or that things would change for the better. In terms of representation only 7% of respondents belong to a union and although nearly 40% of respondents stated an openness to joining a union, open ended responses were pessimistic regarding the benefits of collectivism.

Questions probing fair management showed that less than 50% of workers felt they were treated with dignity and respect or felt their managers/supervisors were supportive. Training is reported as being virtually non-existent.

In terms of matters that might improve hospitality industry employment, pay was cited as the number one issue.

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Introduction

Australia's hospitality industry is a vital component of the nation's domestic and visitor economies. Pre-COVID-19, hospitality generated revenues exceeding \$55 billion across its various sectorsⁱ – and in combination with tourism is forecast to contribute over 10% towards the national GDP by 2025. The hospitality industry also performs a crucial social function, by gathering friends, families, and communities together, to celebrate and connect – be it in cafes, clubs, casinos, classy hotels or even catering delivered to our favourite meeting places. Hospitality employs an estimated 800,000 Australiansⁱⁱ (likely rising to about 1 million when including jobs in the informal economyⁱⁱⁱ). The industry provides executive level career paths to management with multi-national hoteliers, global mobility for artisans like chefs and cocktail bartenders, small business prospects for enterprising hospitalitarians, rewarding local jobs for those that like to work and play in good measure, and valuable pocket money and workplace socialisation experiences for young people passing through to opportunities in other industries. Hospitality employment also creates a unique foothold in the labour market for those that sometimes might struggle to find meaningful work; migrants, Indigenous Australians, persons living with a disability, mid-life career shifters, return to work parents and so on. Hospitality jobs enable these people in our community to be self-sufficient and build self-efficacy, resilience, and social capital. Creating a sustainable hospitality industry, and workforce (see Mooney et al., 2022^{iv}), is therefore a goal that is shared by many stakeholder groups.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a well-documented catastrophic impact on the hospitality industry and employment; and has left a legacy which is now pronouncing the labour and skills shortages to which the industry has been vulnerable for decades^v. In the mid-2022 labour market, with unemployment at a nearly 50 year record low (3.5%^{vi}), the balance of power has somewhat shifted towards workers. This is partially attributable to the inability or unwillingness of some significant traditional cohorts of the hospitality labour market to enter Australia; migrants, and various categories of visa holders such as working holiday makers and international students. Otherwise, as this report confirms, many former hospitality workers have turned their back on the industry seeking employment elsewhere. As a result, in some hospitality occupations and sectors workers have negotiated for better conditions. Nevertheless, as international borders open,

alongside the pressures of rising inflation and a predicted economic downturn^{vii}, the supply/demand dynamics of the labour market will swing back again. Yet the hospitality industry's deep and persistent structural workforce issues will remain. There are several, but a recurring theme has been an industrial culture challenging fair and decent work^{viii}.

This report aims to contribute to a broader conversation regarding fair work. This conversation, set in the context of a skills and labour crisis in hospitality, is gaining momentum internationally and in Australia – particularly in the wake of COVID-19's impacts. While the newly formed UKHospitality released a significant roadmap for the industry to seek employment-related reforms in 2018, they saw fit to significantly revise their strategy with a revamped hospitality workforce strategy^{ix} in mid-2022. Over the past 12 months other jurisdictions have also picked up the fair work mantle. Dr Curran, from NUI Galway, published a report on Irish working conditions^x and in New Zealand Dr Williamson and colleagues released 'Voices from the frontline'^{xi}. Both hospitality industry reports received considerable media, and subsequently policymaker attention.

Here in Australia, United Workers Union (Hospo Voice) launched a roadmap to recovery for the industry^{xii}, highlighting the need for secure jobs. The Australian Government released its THRIVE initiative^{xiii}, which focused on reviving the visitor economy and included as its third priority, to 'grow a secure and resilient workforce'. Yet across these reports and roadmaps, strategies and aspirational plans, all return to a set of well-worn and familiar themes. Many of these are neatly encapsulated in the Fairwork Principles^{xiv} of fair contracts, fair pay, fair conditions, fair representation, and fair management. While this report largely corroborates and confirms similar studies that have been undertaken regarding working conditions in the hospitality industry, it does so on an empirical basis. The report's lead author belongs to an international network of hospitality employment academics, many of whom were involved in discussion regarding the necessity for, and design of, a survey that tested the pulse of the hospitality workforce. This survey, with minor local modifications, was administered in Ireland, Scotland, Norway, Greece, and New Zealand. The focus of the study around the Fairwork Principles allows for consideration of direct and actionable policy and practice reforms.



Research Background

The five fair work principles are a project born out of Fairwork^{xv} and the Oxford Internet Institute, a subdivision of Oxford University. The Fairwork project aim is to establish and measure decent work primarily in the platform economy, which is highly relevant to hospitality work in accommodation and foodservice (e.g., AirBnB/Stayz and UberEats/Deliveroo). Fairwork utilises its five principles and articulates them into a scoring system. Yet the narrative of decent work is not a new one for the hospitality industry and its workers. For decades academic research, consulting projects and government policy papers have framed up the labour conditions and challenges of hospitality labour^{xvi}. The affordances for mobility and travel, acquiring transferable skills, working in exciting and stimulating ‘people’ environments with instant rewards and memorable experiences are just some of the enticements that hospitality has to offer, and many people are seduced by the lifestyle and make life-long and rewarding careers in the industry.

On the flipside the long, unsociable, and demanding hours, often unevenly distributed across the seasonal tourism and hospitality calendar, make working conditions challenging. This can be exacerbated by emotional labour – that is the pressure staff feel to put on a smile even in the face of unpleasant customers and/or not feeling well – leading to a ‘faking’ of emotions; which has been demonstrated to negatively impact wellbeing and work-life balance^{xvii}. Similarly, the concept of aesthetic labour, or lookism, can layer stresses on staff who feel as though they have to perform for customers in ways that might conflict with who they feel they are, or how they prefer to dress. These factors are well understood as impacting wellbeing, even before the additional protocols that were introduced during COVID-19 added layers to emotional and aesthetic labour.

Much has also been written on the so-called hygiene factors in hospitality work. Key amongst these are low-levels of pay and even then widespread wage theft^{xviii}. Various aspects of harassment and abuse are well-documented in the literature. Sexual harassment, perhaps linked to the above-mentioned aesthetic labour, the prevalence of alcohol or the general relaxed and fun ambience hospitality tries to create for guests have been cited as attributions^{xix}. What these breaches of worker rights and conditions do is call into question a) what decent and dignified work should look like, and b) how sustainable hospitality employment is. Given that contingent work is the norm, with the gig and platform economies now normalising zero contract and piece-work, the point is that hospitality work is precarious and actually leads to precarious lives^{xx}.

These factors contribute to typically high turnover rates in the industry – both between organisations but also attrition to other industries – as we are witnessing amid-COVID-19^{xxi}. Recent research^{xxii} has challenged the tourism and hospitality industries to consider sustainable human resource management (SHRM) and sustainable workforce practices. But these aspirations are not limited to the organisational domain – alongside some of the historical characteristics and cultural norms in the hospitality industry other structural issues are proving equally challenging. These include the growth of the informal economy, the impact of the disrupters, for example AirBnB and other platform accommodation providers, and food delivery^{xxiii}. Furthermore, low entry barriers to business ownership mean that at any one time there is more supply of product than the market can support. This spreads the labour force even more thinly, mitigating secure and regular work offerings.

Methods and sample

The survey was administered via several social media channels, principally hospitality network groups hosted by Facebook, across the summer of 2021/2022. Some of these group networks were national and State-based, but most served hospitality communities in Australia's major metropolitan cities. The survey contained both closed and open-ended questions capturing the key dimensions of Fairwork and a modified Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Survey (DASS) scale was used to capture wellbeing. The survey received 297 fully recorded responses, and 86 partially recorded responses, resulting in 383 usable responses which were subject to analysis. The sample is generally representative of the hospitality workforce, which tends to be dominated by younger workers, with 73% of the sample being under 35 years of age. Due to ethical guidelines the study was unable to garner responses from workers under 18 years of age.

Table 1 - Age - Sample profile

Age (n=383)	Count	%
18-25 years	105	27.42%
26-35 years	179	46.74%
36-45 years	54	14.10%
46-55 years	32	8.36%
56-65 years	8	2.09%
Prefer not to say	5	1.31%

Fewer women than men responded to the survey, which is surprising given that women outnumber men in hospitality employment, and because this survey gave voice to issues that women are particularly vulnerable to, for example sexual harassment.

Table 2 - Gender - Sample profile

Gender (n=383)	Count	%
Male	190	49.61%
Female	183	47.78%
Transgender Female	1	0.26%
Transgender Male	4	1.04%
Prefer not to say	5	1.31%

The study attracted respondents with strong tenure in the hospitality industry. This ensured that most respondents were reflecting on substantial experiences of working in the industry.

Table 3 - Years in hospitality - Sample profile

Years in hospitality (n=383)	Count	%
Less than 3 years	47	12.27%
Between 3 and up to 10 years	165	43.08%
Between 10 and 20 year	123	32.11%
More than 20 years	48	12.53%
Total	383	100.00%

Figure 1 - Role & Sector



With regards to nationality, most participants (68.12%) identified as Australian (n=203). The rest were a myriad of nationalities including British (n=16), New Zealander (n=11), Nepalese (n=9), Brazilian (n=7), Chinese (n=5), Irish (n=5), and others.

An open-ended question asked respondents to indicate their job role and sector, and this is represented in the word cloud above. Confirmed by other responses it reveals respondents as holding more senior positions and being predominantly experienced campaigners; that is professionals with many years' service in the industry rather than workers who were passing through the industry, as is common with students for instance.



Fairwork Principles

Fair contracts

While nearly half the sample were employed full-time, over half the sample were employed part-time, casually or under other contingent worker arrangements.

Table 4 - Employment status

Employment status	Count	%
Temporary part-time with employer	10	2.61%
Permanent part-time with employer	34	8.88%
Temporary full-time with employer	10	2.61%
Permanent full-time with employer	171	44.65%
Zero hours contract (casual/on-call workers)	144	37.60%
Other	14	3.66%
Total	383	100.00%

Regarding contracts, 33.7% admitted to not having written terms, however the number could be higher due to a desirability bias in responding.

Table 5 - Fair contracts questions

Fair contracts questions (n=383)	Yes	No	Unsure
Were you given written terms of your employment before commencement of your most recent or current hospitality job?	64.75%	33.68%	1.57%
Did you sign a contract of employment agreement with your employer before starting your current or most recent job?	66.84%	31.33%	1.83%
Does your employer give you a pay slip on a regular basis showing gross pay and all deductions?	90.60%	8.36%	1.04%



Fair Pay

Regarding pay 12% of the respondents said they were paid below minimum wage. 44% reported not receiving pay entitlements for overtime or holiday loadings and over 50% reported no benefits beyond a basic wage.

Table 6 - Fair pay questions

Fair pay questions (n=383)	Yes	No	Unsure
Are/were you paid at least the current legal minimum hourly wage (last workplace)?	80.94%	12.01%	7.05%
Are/were there opportunities for you to get a pay rise or promotion at work?	40.99%	46.48%	12.53%
Do/did you get any benefits at work besides basic pay?	44.13%	52.22%	3.66%
Do/did you get overtime pay (or time off) for working during statutory/public holidays?	52.74%	44.39%	2.87%
Do/did you get the rest breaks you are entitled to by law (last workplace)?	44.91%	49.35%	5.74%

When asked to provide examples of opportunities for pay rises and promotion, respondents mentioned the possibility of becoming a manager most. **Figure 2** reflects their responses.

When asked what benefit they receive, respondent mentioned free meals, discounted services, unpaid leave, and free alcohol (**Figure 3**). Interestingly, standard benefits across other industries are missing, e.g., healthcare, child support, wellness support, balance, and so on.

Figure 2 - Opportunities



Figure 3 - Received benefits



Fair conditions

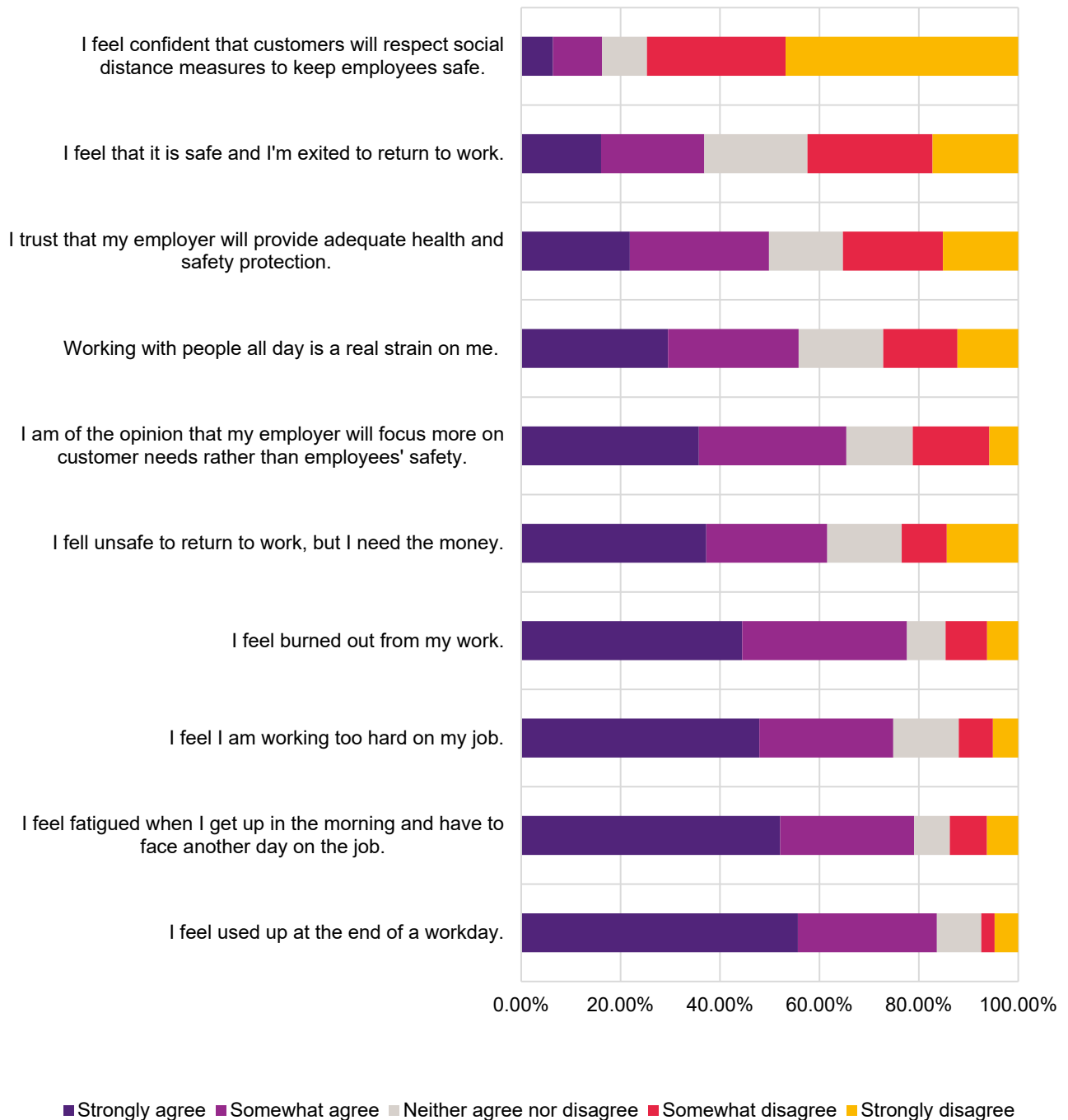
Wellbeing emerged as a significant issue during COVID-19 for the general population, nevermind workers in industries like hospitality that were deeply impacted. To capture wellbeing we administered an abbreviated Depression, Anxiety and Stress Survey (DASS), which is commonly used by General Practitioners in local practice.

Table 7 - General working conditions (DASS)

General working conditions (n=383)	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel used up at the end of a workday.	55.65%	27.98%	8.93%	2.68%	4.76%
I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job.	52.10%	26.95%	7.19%	7.49%	6.29%
I feel I am working too hard on my job.	47.90%	26.95%	13.17%	6.89%	5.09%
I feel burned out from my work.	44.48%	33.13%	7.76%	8.36%	6.27%
I felt unsafe to return to work, but I need the money.	37.24%	24.34%	14.96%	9.09%	14.37%
I am of the opinion that my employer will focus more on customer needs rather than employees' safety.	35.76%	29.65%	13.37%	15.41%	5.81%
Working with people all day is a real strain on me.	29.55%	26.27%	17.01%	14.93%	12.24%
I trust that my employer will provide adequate health and safety protection.	21.87%	27.99%	14.87%	20.12%	15.16%
I feel that it is safe and I'm excited to return to work.	16.08%	20.76%	20.76%	25.15%	17.25%
I feel confident that customers will respect social distance measures to keep employees safe.	6.40%	9.88%	9.01%	27.91%	46.80%

The results show that for the negative statements (e.g., 'I feel burned out from my work'), the vast majority of respondents 'strongly agreed' or 'somewhat agreed'. For positive statements (e.g., 'I feel confident that customers will respect social distance measures to keep employees safe') the majority of respondents 'strongly disagreed' or 'somewhat agreed'. The graph below visualises these response trends.

Figure 4 - DASS results



DASS by gender

Table 8 - Gender differences (DASS)

Gender differences (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree)	Male (n=167)		Female (n=164)	
	Mean	Std. dev	Mean	Std. dev
I feel confident that customers will respect social distance measures to keep employees safe.	2.57	1.531	2.24	1.305
I am of the opinion that my employer will focus more on customer needs rather than employees' safety.	2.91	1.330	3.19	1.338
I feel that it is safe and I'm excited to return to work.	2.84	1.390	2.71	1.388
I trust that my employer will provide adequate health and safety protection.	3.92	1.284	4.01	1.207
Working with people all day is a real strain on me.	3.29	2.381	3.19	2.379
I felt unsafe to return to work, but I need the money.	1.86	1.120	1.60	0.989
I feel burnt out from my work.	2.07	1.279	1.74	1.127
I feel I am working too hard on my job.	2.76	1.358	2.33	1.359
I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job.	2.12	1.258	1.86	1.141
I feel used up at the end of a workday.	2.05	1.234	1.85	1.080

This table shows that there are some meaningful gender differences in the DASS responses. For example, men report being more burnt out, fatigued and working too hard, than women. On the other hand women have less faith in customers and employers addressing their needs.



DASS by time in the industry

Table 9 - Time in the industry (DASS)

Time in the hospitality sector	Less than 3 years (n=40)		Between 3 and 10 years (n=142)		Between 10 years and 20 (n=112)		More than 20 years (n=44)	
(1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree)	Mean	Std. dev	Mean	Std. dev	Mean	Std. dev	Mean	Std. dev
I feel confident that customers will respect social distance measures to keep employees safe.	2.25	1.276	2.30	1.362	2.33	1.454	2.95	1.599
I am of the opinion that my employer will focus more on customer needs rather than employees' safety.	3.15	1.388	3.03	1.269	3.27	1.368	2.58	1.357
I feel that it is safe and I'm excited to return to work.	2.78	1.441	2.82	1.372	2.85	1.403	2.49	1.342
I trust that my employer will provide adequate health and safety protection.	3.80	1.363	4.04	1.238	4.04	1.177	3.85	1.316
Working with people all day is a real strain on me.	3.30	2.409	3.12	2.297	3.12	2.474	3.74	2.304
I felt unsafe to return to work, but I need the money.	1.73	1.037	1.72	0.918	1.61	1.134	2.07	1.232
I feel burned out from my work.	1.83	1.010	1.75	1.052	1.93	1.353	2.29	1.359
I feel I am working too hard on my job.	2.65	1.460	2.42	1.281	2.43	1.424	3.07	1.355
I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job.	2.23	1.271	1.93	1.126	1.84	1.162	2.38	1.336
I feel used up at the end of a workday.	2.08	1.185	1.91	1.124	1.86	1.195	2.13	1.198

As shown in the table above, results regarding tenure and wellbeing are mixed but tend to show that workers become more resilient over time. However as tenure increases, their responses become less confident in terms of support from employers and customer understanding.

COVID-19

The COVID-19 employment impacts are shown in table 10. A standout finding is that 10% of respondents state they are unlikely to return to hospitality employment in the foreseeable future.

Table 10 - Effects of COVID-19

The effects of COVID-19 on employment (n=383)	% of sample
I continued to work through lock-down	45.17%
I am/have been on furlough	10.70%
I have returned to work	35.25%
I have been retrenched/laid-off	6.53%
I am not working at present, but look to start working again in a couple of months	2.61%
It is unlikely that I will return to hospitality work in the foreseeable future	9.92%
Unsure	3.66%

Respondents were asked whether they felt safe to return to work in hospitality (n=353). 32.86% (n=116) declared not feeling safe to work, while 56.09% (n=198) are willing to do so given proper safety measures. The rest (n=39) remains undecided. The following table represents perceptions of safety associated with different strategies.

Table 11 - Perceptions of safety

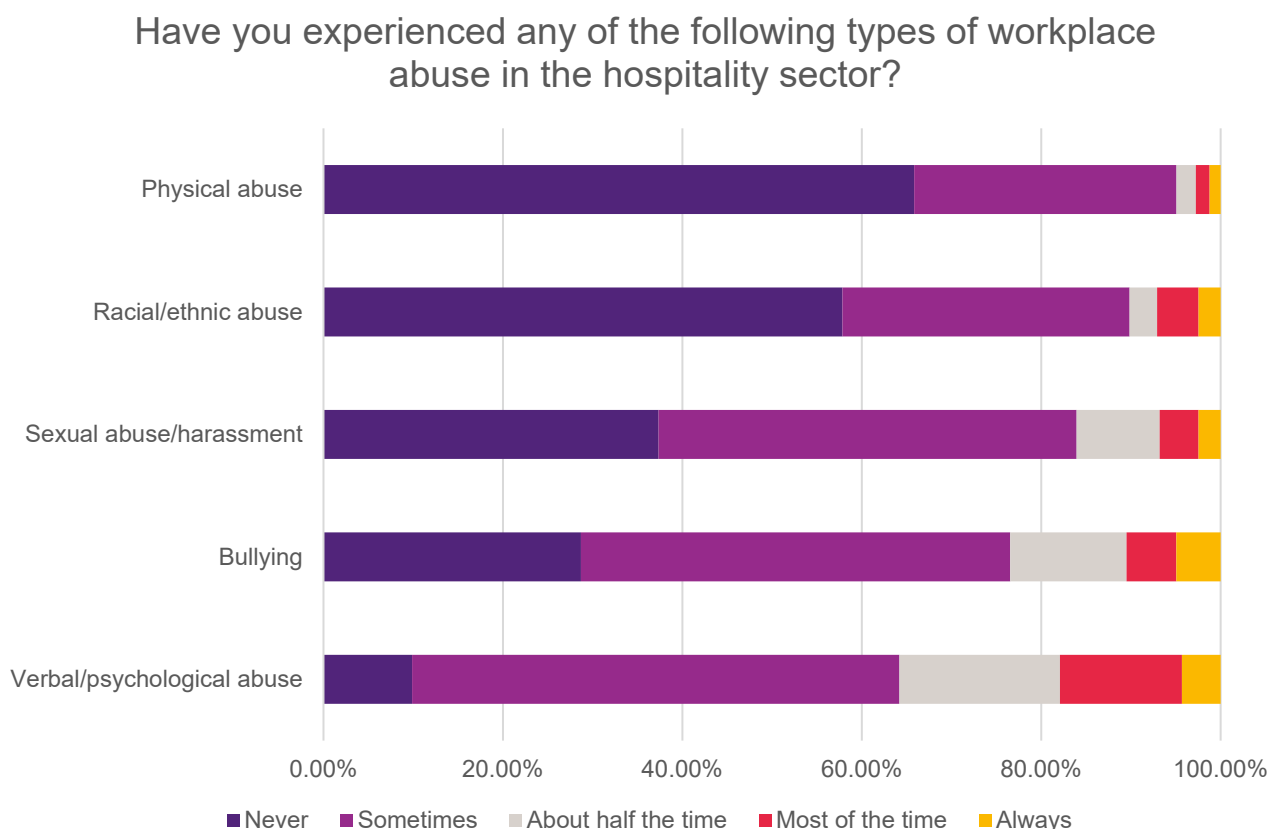
Perception of safety associated with strategies (n=383)	% of sample
Availability of antibacterial products	58.22%
Customers wearing masks	57.70%
Employees wash their hands	54.57%
Customers wash their hands	50.65%
Employees wearing masks	49.61%
Social distancing	47.26%
Daily disinfection of the workplace	47.00%
Limiting the number of customers	46.74%
None of the above	12.01%
Other	6.79%

Interestingly, several respondents noted that they felt unsafe when being tasked to enforce COVID-19 rules in their venues, often being disrespected and argued with. Security guards were mentioned as a COVID-19 safety strategy. Other comments notably include cashless transactions, mandatory vaccinations for staff and customers, and a stronger focus on safety from management.

Abuse

Figure 5 clearly shows that various forms of abuse are prevalent in the working experiences of respondents with over 60% experiencing verbal/psychological, bullying, or sexual harassment.

Figure 5 - Forms of abuse experienced

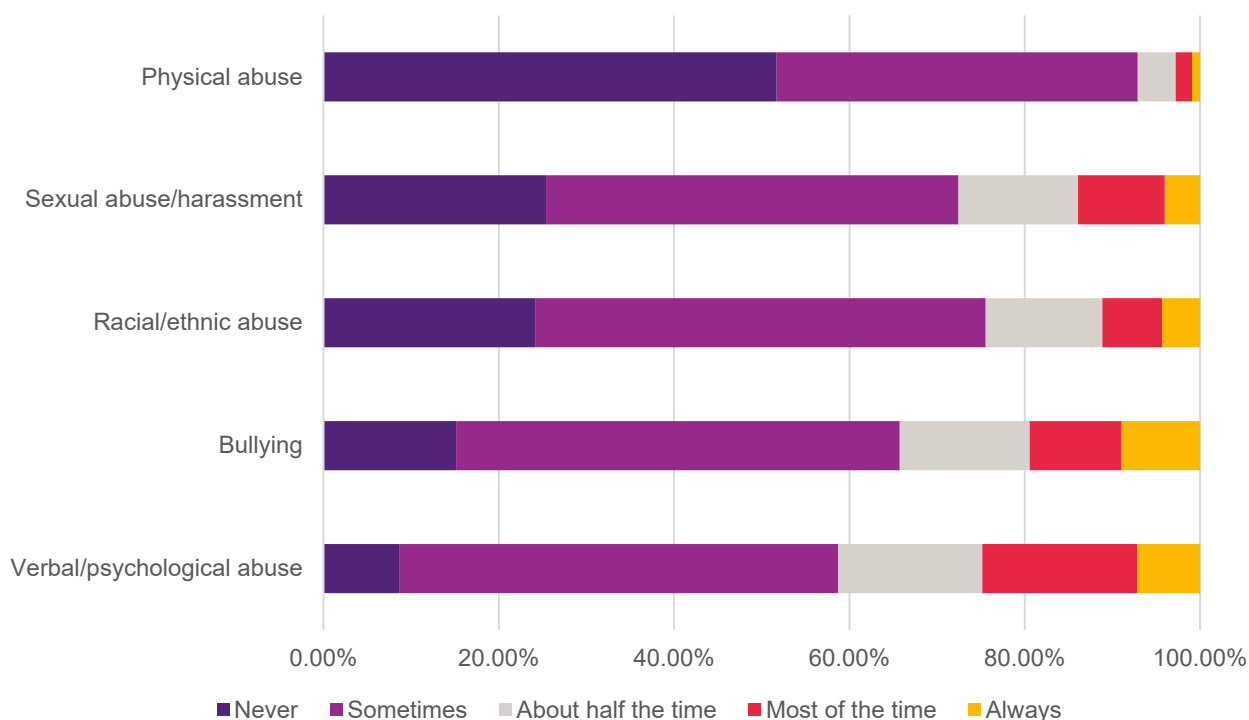


When asked to elaborate, respondents shared stories that mostly relate to abusive managers or customers. Here are a few examples:

- *"The verbal and racial abuse has never come from my co-workers. It's always customers. Somehow, they think racism is funny..."*
- *"Being a female in the hospitality sector always comes with risks. Sexual harassment is so common from customers and in some cases from other employees."*
- *"Customers are often verbally abusive and rude; some staff make inappropriate comments about things I wear and how I look etc"*
- *"I've had customers spit on me, pull my hair, grab my breasts and backside, follow me to my car, call me a *****, try to jump the bar and punch me, had a bottle hit me in the head"*

Figure 6 - Forms of abuse witnessed

Have you witnessed any of the following types of workplace abuse in the hospitality sector?



Over 70% of respondents reported having witnessed verbal/psychological abuse, bullying, sexual harassment and/or racial abuse. When asked to elaborate on the abuses they witnessed, respondents mentioned:

- *"I witness and call out a lot of misogyny at my current workplace. It seems it's been a long-standing culture since before I started here."*
- *"The sexual harassment of some of our younger workers by older men (guests) i.e. touching and saying sexually suggestive things."*
- *"Until just before the pandemic there was a lot of sexual harassment specifically aimed at females. I don't know a single female bartender who hasn't been yelled at, groped, made to feel creeped out and afraid in hospitality."*
- *"Staff who have been in the sector for longer tend to use outdated stereotypes to dictate who does what job, for example the boys will carry heavy objects and will talk to customers who need to be cut off from drinking. I have also found that staff will use discriminatory words to describe customers to other employees, these have included racial, sex, age and mental/physical impairments. Staff regularly belittle other employees behind their backs and will be overly harsh when simply fixed errors are made because it was how they were taught."*

Table 12 - Abuse perpetrators

Perpetrators (n=109)	% of sample
Customer	50.52%
Supervisor/manager	42.71%
Colleague/co-worker	39.06%
Owner	26.30%
Other	3.65%

The reported main perpetrators are customers. Managers and colleagues are not far behind. Owners are last (likely due to a less visible presence in some workplaces).

36.7% of the respondents declared the abuses they witnessed were reported. 43% stated that no reports were made, the remainder being unsure. Most reports were sent internally to HR or higher management. A very few stated having reported issues to Fair Work or the police.

Reasons for not reporting include:

- *"No one would care and it would cause more problems than it would solve"*
- *"Lack of faith anything would change. Reacted accordingly"*
- *"Police take too long to get there it's not worth the time on the phone"*
- *"I feel it is normal"*
- *"I have reported incidents in the past and nothing has happened. Most hospitality workers feel that there's no point."*
- *"It was hard to distinguish between simple drama and what actually classified as bullying. Or maybe my tolerance for it is too low."*

Reporting the abuses led to actions in 47.7% of cases. Most often, staff are not informed whether their reportage led to any actions.



Fair representation

Only 6.7% (n=20) of respondents (n=301) are unionised. The few that declared being members reported belonging to Hospitality Union, CMAA, United Workers Union (Hospo Voice), and United Voice.

When asked, 39.9% (n=113) of the respondents stated being open to joining a union, 27.6% (n=78) being against the idea. Interestingly, a large portion of the sample declared being unsure (32.5%, n=92). Reasons for not joining include:

- *"The hospitality union has no power, is extremely disorganised, and have historically broken the law when performing demonstrations"*
- *"I'll never join a union, they are one of the sickness of the industry!"*
- *"Most unions do more harm than good. Was a member and they only were after more money and less work and skills"*
- *"I'm unsure what it does, but I'm not fussed"*
- *"Because hospitality would shut down if it were unionized"*
- *"Unions are a waste of money, I have seen worker unions completely ruin workplaces"*
- *"I think half of the problem in hospitality is that it isn't unionised and the employer always wins. There's a new union in Australia called hospo voice that I've considered joining but I don't know if it would be worth it."*

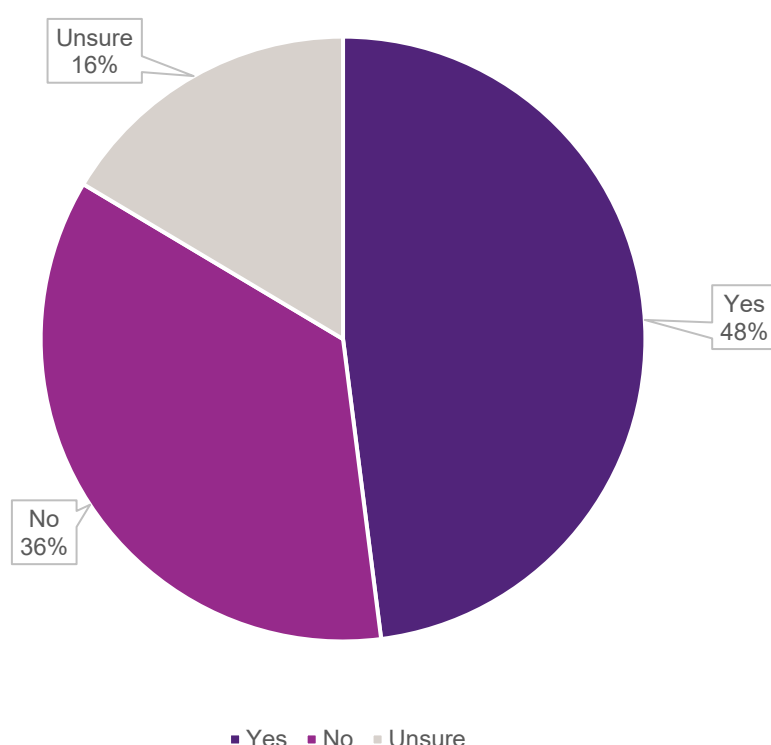


Fair management

Respect and dignity

Figure 7 - Respect and dignity

In your current or previous job, do you feel you are/were treated with dignity and respect (last workplace)?



48% of respondents (n=143) stated being treated with dignity and respect at work. The majority (52%) declared being either disrespected or unsure whether respect was shown. When asked to explain their answers, respondents mentioned:

Respected employees:

- *"My employer understands that hospitality is hard and can identify when I am burnt out or overwhelmed. They offer support and are happy to give me the time I need to recoup. They're also excellent mentors - in hospitality and in life lessons too"*
- *"My current job has a very good and considerable supervisor. She has reached out to her employees about workplace issues that she has control over (ie issues with co workers)"*
- *"My current job is fabulous. Best place I've ever worked."*
- *"My current workplace is so many so much different than most workplaces I've been in and I need because it's probably run by another middle-aged woman who is all about empowering other women."*
- *"Owners are receptive of my input, and provide me with the tools and resources to best perform my duties"*

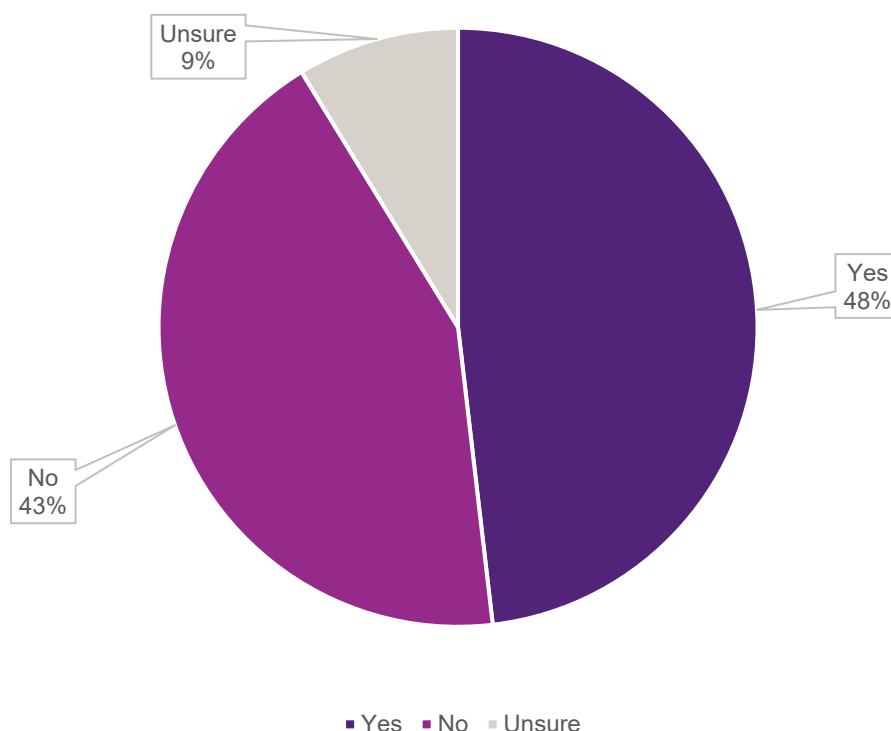
Disrespected employees:

- *"Chefs and waiters or waitresses are always looked down upon as dispensable items they're paid trash money for doing long hours in mostly hot environments high stress and putting up with terrible customers"*
- *"I was treated as an interchangeable cog in a corporate machine that operated multiple stores. Workers' issues were often brought to corporate's attention only to be completely ignored, while issues relating to sales and marketing were given utmost priority"*
- *"Felt like a piece of meat to be looked at, was worked like a dog and my mental health wasn't considered when brought up."*
- *"Just been sent home today for talking during less than 2 mins to a customer. Not getting paid this week hours. Definitely calling fairwork but unsure if its gonna help."*

Feedback

Figure 8 - Supportive feedback

Are/were you given supportive feedback on the work you do by your manager (last workplace)?



When asked whether management provided them with supportive feedback in their workplace, 48.2% (n=143) answered yes.

- *"I was often told when I was doing a good job. If something was not being handled well, a manager would take care of it and later explain the situation and correct action to me in private"*
- *"Quarterly reviewing performance and planning future development"*
- *"They let me know what they like and what they want me to do differently"*

- “My boss is always open to conversations about any difficulties I face.”
- “I work for catering companies and often they pass on feedback from the clients”

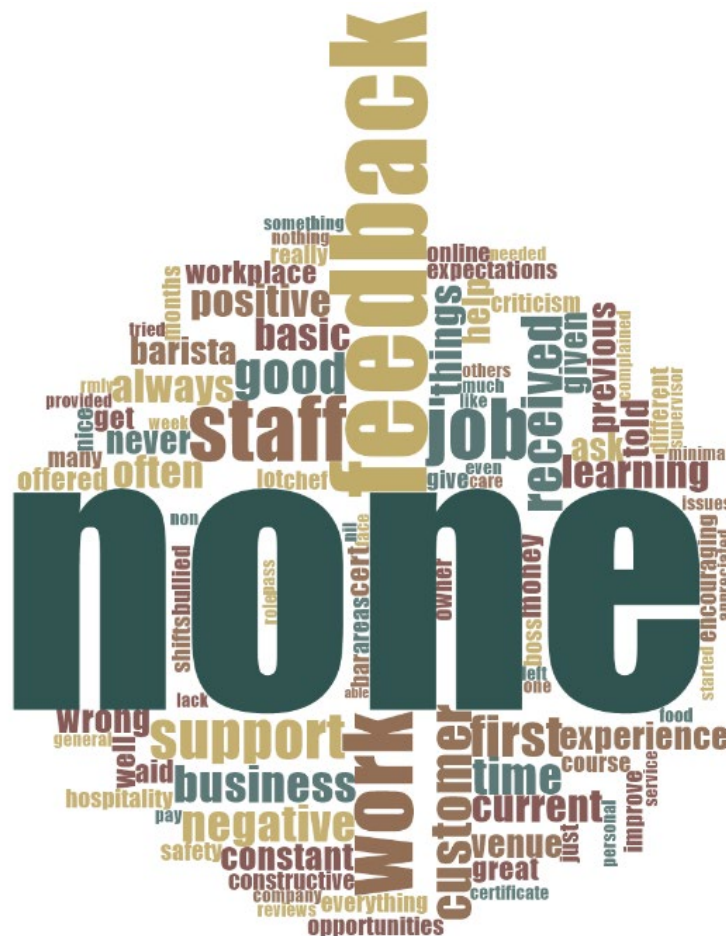
On the other hand, many respondents stated that feedback received was solely focused on criticism.

- “My previous employer would either be silent or volatile.”
- “Even if you did a great job that is just expected as the bare minimum and unless something was particularly special nobody cared what you did if it was positive, they only started to say things if they wanted to be negative.”
- “Whenever feedback was received it was negative feedback focussed solely on what I was doing wrong. Positive/encouraging feedback was very rare despite my better-than-average performance”
- “Never heard when I was doing good but everyone was constantly pulled into meetings about everything they’re doing wrong even when the good drastically outweighed the bad”

Training

From the comments provided, it is apparent that very little training is provided to the respondents. Those that are satisfied with their work mention different forms of upskilling, like barista, wine, cocktail, supervisor trainings. Yet, most stated that management did not organise any form of training for their staff.

Figure 9 - Training



What changes would make hospitality a better place to work?

Figure 10 - Changes for a better workplace



When asked what changes would make hospitality a better place to work, responses included:

- “Less pressure put on employees”
- “Pay rates that match inflation for the last 30 years instead of the stagnation they’ve been. Penalties MANDATORY as the industry thrives off of weekends. No EBA, or enterprise agreements. Guaranteed paid time off, no casual employment for any employee racking over 25 hours a week.”
- “4 day work week, enforcement 7.5hr shifts and breaks and overtime hours that are tracked. So, more accountability. If a business cannot operate with staff having a 30 minute break because there isn’t enough staff on, the business isn’t sustainable”

- *“Put simply better wages better work life balance more staffing, more than training, more support from upper management, more understanding from customers.”*
- *“Better training of apprentices, less pressure to work even when sick, more care given to prevent bullying and suicide”*
- *“Improve wages and conditions by enforcing current legislation in smaller establishments that seem to get away with stretching your workloads and hours without remuneration”*
- *“Not let the customer be always right. There is a line that can be crossed and not allow them to only be banned for extreme disorderly conduct”*
- *“More focus on mental health and mental fatigue. Employers having more empathy towards employees and seeing them as humans, not place holders.”*
- *“Better pay, especially for unsociable hours and a culture shift away from mistreating workers in the service industry. The customer is most definitely NOT always right.”*
- *“Customers need to know we are real people with a real job and that we must be respected and treated as equal human beings. Owners also need to respect their workers better and be far more upfront about awards, pay rates, penalties etc.”*
- *“Transparent pay, negotiable hours. I'm fine working weekends but once every few months would be nice to have a weekend off. Better trust and acknowledgment of you're role and what you actually do. Recognition that employees are what make a venue and what bring people back. Not just what is being sold”*



Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of this report are sobering. Although the survey cannot claim to be representative of the Australian hospitality industry because the method did not use probability sampling, its results are validated by cross-checking with decades of research on working conditions in the hospitality industry. The findings are also corroborated by a large-scale (amid-COVID-19) survey by Hospo Voice here in Australia, and similar (amid-COVID-19) reports from Ireland and New Zealand. These research and reports were cited in the introduction. Collectively, this body of work speaks to an industrial culture which is disrespectful and neglectful of the rights of many workers and contrary to the spirit of hospitality. As has become common, the findings also question how serious the hospitality industry is about moving towards an observance of some of the key sustainable development goals (SDGs)^{xxiv}, in particular SDG8 relating to decent work and SDG5 relating to gender equality.

The Fairwork principles have provided a systematic and structured framework to investigate some pressing issues in hospitality employment. This framework enables several top-line recommendations to flow from this study, most of which can be achieved by industry itself with the encouragement, support and commitment of key industry stakeholders and peak associations.

- **Contracts** – a minimum requirement for workers in hospitality is the **issuing of contracts** outlining the terms and conditions of employment. Wherever possible contracts should err towards full-time or part-time contracts **offering employees security**. In negotiating contracts employers are advised to listen carefully to what **flexibility means to their employees**, as flexibility is currently defined on the terms and needs of employers.
- **Pay** – the second recommendation is that industry **unwaveringly adhere to minimum award rates** including penalty loadings for over-time and public holiday shifts, as well as periods of leave and other entitlements as applicable by law. Harsher enforcement should be considered if self-regulation consistently fails. Organisations are highly encouraged to **develop mechanisms for employees to gain pay rises** without promotion, for example for demonstrated performance and productivity which positively impacts unit profitability.
- **Conditions** – employers need to commit to providing its employees with a **safe workplace and dignified conditions**. Abuse of all forms, whether from customers, co-workers or supervisors is unacceptable. Industry needs to work hard to create occupational and organisational cultures of respect, and education of customers, recognising that hospitality work is stressful enough by its very nature. Access for workers to **Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) should be mandatory** in all hospitality workplaces, to ensure workers' wellbeing is acknowledged and supported.
- **Representation** – collectivism provides for meaningful representation of employees and an independent and transparent forum for **negotiation and dispute resolution**. Union membership should be embraced by employees and not be discouraged by employers. Giving workers voice can benefit the industry by **creating a sustainable workforce**.
- **Management** – managers and supervisors are the **guardians of positive organisational practices**. They need to be aware that beyond operations they have a **solemn duty of care to the employees** they supervise and direct. Positive change is led from the top.

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Contact details

Associate Professor Richard N.S. Robinson

T +61 7 3346 7091

E richard.robinson@business.uq.edu.au

W business.uq.edu.au

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