



UNIONS AND GOOD WORK

Results of an Amicus survey on the quality of people's work experiences



Executive summary

- Results from the Amicus 'Good Work' survey identify the areas where the quality of people's working lives are most lacking as job security, control over the working environment, and being treated with fairness and dignity at work.
- Experiences in respect of health and safety and whether people find their jobs interesting are somewhat better, but even here much more can be done.
- There is a strong correlation between people having a trade union voice in the workplace and reporting positive experiences in respect of being treated fairly at work, and feeling in control of their working environment.
- Trade unions make a difference, particularly where there are effective relationships with employers and government.



Introduction

In May 2006 Amicus launched its 'Good Work' campaign and published an *Agenda for Better Jobs*¹. The report highlighted the need to consider the quality of work experienced by those in employment and argued that 'good work' needs to be at the centre of the policy and negotiating agendas.

The *Amicus Agenda for Better Jobs* identified five key elements that need to be considered in the pursuit of improving the quality of people's working lives.

They are:

- A safe and healthy workplace
- Control over the working environment
- Secure and interesting work (including support for skills and learning)
- Fairness and dignity at work
- A trade union voice.

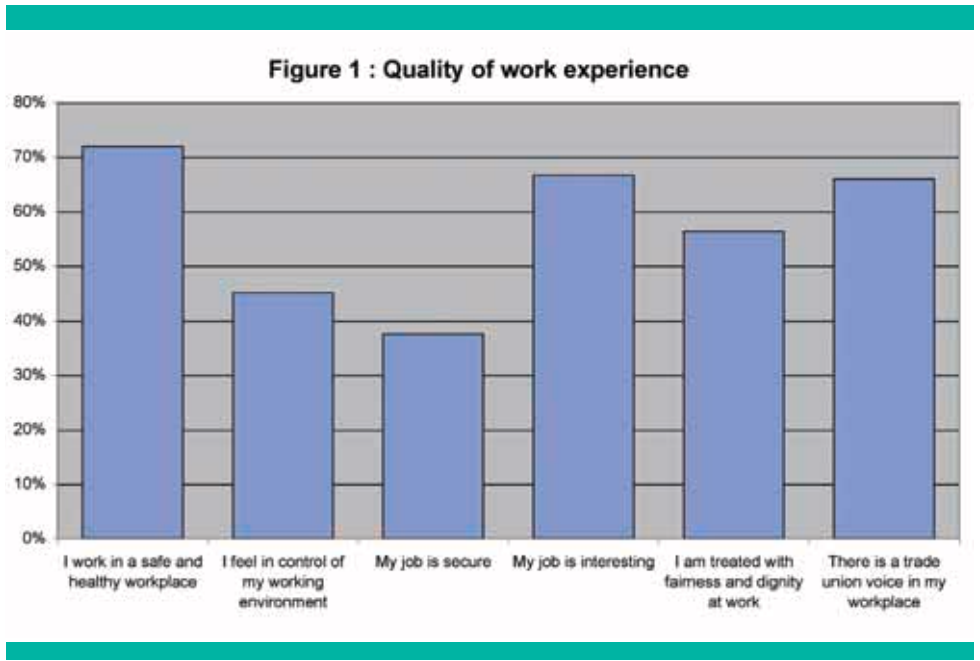
As part of the campaign we conducted an on-line survey² asking people to identify how their jobs matched up against these criteria. This report presents the findings of that survey.

¹ Good Work : An Amicus Agenda for Better Jobs – available at www.amicustheunion.org

² A questionnaire was made available on the Amicus website to which there were 553 responses.

Quality of work experiences

Figure 1 shows the proportion of respondents who for each element said that they positively experienced it as part of their job.



These findings show that the areas where respondents' work experiences are most falling short are job security, control of the work environment and being treated with fairness and dignity at work.

Whilst the story in respect of the extent to which respondents said their workplaces were safe and their jobs were interesting is somewhat better, there is still considerable room for improvement.

Two thirds (66%) of respondents said that they had a trade union voice in their workplace³. There is a significant relationship between key elements of people's work experiences and having a trade union voice and this is explored in more detail in the section below on 'Unions and good work'.

Less than two in five respondents (38%) said that their job was secure. As noted in our earlier report⁴, in certain areas – such as manufacturing – this feeling of insecurity is well founded. But at a time of relatively full employment, and when average job tenure has changed little in the last 15 years, many people are still feeling insecure in their jobs. This can be associated with the rapid pace of organisational change.

Less than half of respondents (45%) said that they feel in control of their working environment. This again echoes research cited in our earlier report highlighting the extent to which people feel they have no control over the influence they have over their job and their level of involvement in decision making, as well as concerns about labour intensity and working time.

56% of respondents said that they were treated with fairness and dignity at work. The corollary of this, of-course, is that more than two in five (44%) did not feel that they were treated fairly.

67% of respondents said that their job was interesting (33% said it wasn't) and nearly three quarters (72%) said that they worked in a safe and healthy workplace.

These figures are interesting in themselves and, in many ways, support other data that exists in respect of people's work experiences⁵.

However, what is particularly illuminating in this survey is what happens when we compare the results of those who say they have a trade union voice in their workplace with those who say they do not have such a voice. It is to this that we now turn our attention.

³ This is higher than national surveys such as the Labour Force Survey and the Workplace Employment Relations Survey on account of the significant proportion of participants (87%) who are Amicus members

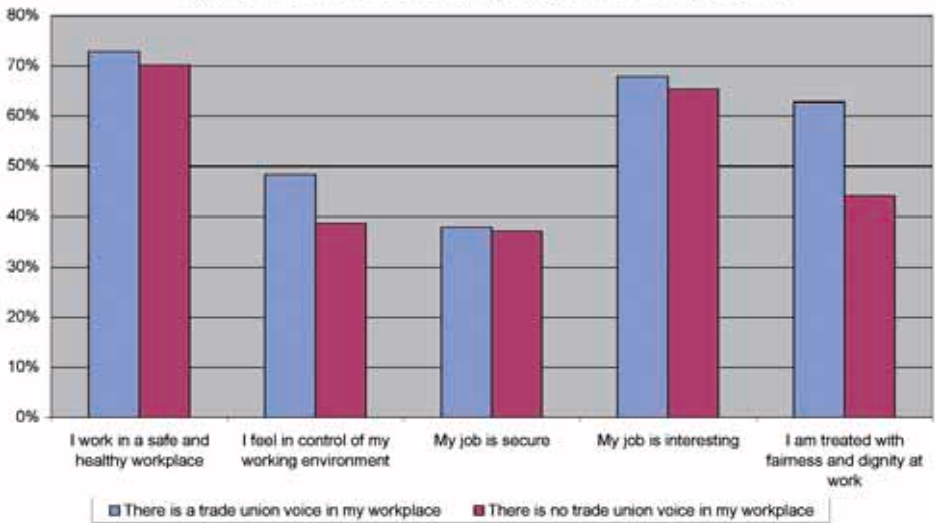
⁴ Good Work : An Amicus Agenda for Better Jobs – available at www.amicustheunion.org

⁵ Ibid

Unions and good work

On every indicator used in the questionnaire to consider respondents' quality of working life, those who have a trade union voice in the workplace report a more positive experience than those who do not. For two areas in particular – fairness and dignity at work, and control of the work environment – the differences are significant. This is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2 : Union voice and quality of work experience



63% of those with a trade union voice in the workplace said that they were treated with fairness and dignity at work compared to 44% of those without a trade union voice. This reinforces the argument that trade unions wield a 'sword of justice' effect⁶.

Although just less than half (48%) of those with a trade union voice in the workplace said that they feel in control of their working environment, this was considerably more than the proportion of those without a trade union voice (39%).

Conclusion

Results from the Amicus 'Good Work' survey identify the areas where the quality of people's working lives are most lacking as job security, control over the working environment and being treated with fairness and dignity at work.

There is a strong correlation between people having a trade union voice in the workplace and reporting positive experiences in respect of being treated fairly at work, and feeling in control of their working environment.

Amicus will continue to promote the 'quality of work' agenda, but there is also a message here for employers and government.

Improving the quality of people's working lives not only enhances individuals' personal well-being but it helps lead to better, more successful organisations and a more productive economy. Trade unions make a difference, particularly where there are effective relationships with employers and government.

**For further information on *Good Work*
contact John Earls at john.earls@amicustheunion.org**

⁶ David Metcalf, *British Unions : Resurgence or Perdition?* (The Work Foundation, 2005)

Amicus
Hayes Court, West Common Road,
Hayes, Bromley BR2 7AU
Tel 0845 850 4242 **Fax** 020 8315 8234
www.amicustheunion.org

September 2006

