

ITF ORGANISING MANUAL

INDUSTRY

RESEARCH

**We need to identify who the employer or decision maker is.** This is the person or entity that can make a difference in working conditions. This is who we will need to pressure. Usually this will be the direct employer. Sometimes it will be a government entity. It may be the company that hires the sub-contracting company, even though the sub-contractor is the direct employer.

**If there is no direct employer, we may have to force a decision maker to admit that they have control over working conditions.** We may even have to force a public entity to become the employer of the workers.

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- \* *What do we know about the employer or decision maker?*
  - \* *Who controls the decisions?*
  - \* *Where does the profit come from?*

#### **Learning from each other**

*The Transport Workers' Union of Australia (TWU) has represented self-employed truck drivers for nearly a century. Approximately 30 per cent of the membership of the national union are owner drivers.*

*The union has successfully targeted decision makers to win a part in the state government's regulatory framework, making the retailers as well as the contracting companies subject to inspections by the union and liable for prosecution.*

*TWU's research has shown that the Australian retail sector wields considerable power. Retail companies effectively dictate the pricing and*

*delivery times with the major transport operators, who in turn sub-contract to smaller operators and owner drivers.*

*TWU has organised under the theme of "Safe Rates". They have been able to prove the link between low pay rates and safety problems for drivers and the public. 3,000 delegates have been through formal union training. Owner drivers have succeeded by blocking bridges, organising for a "go slow" convoy to parliament, and lobbying politicians, academics and the public for support.*

**Sarah Kain and Michael Rawling**  
*Journal of Industrial Relations of Australia, Vol. 51:3*

## INDUSTRY RESEARCH

*\* If it is a government entity that is the decision maker, what voting groups are important to this entity?*

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In order to impact on the employer or decision maker, we need to know what entities and organisations are important to them. You will need to gather information about these entities.

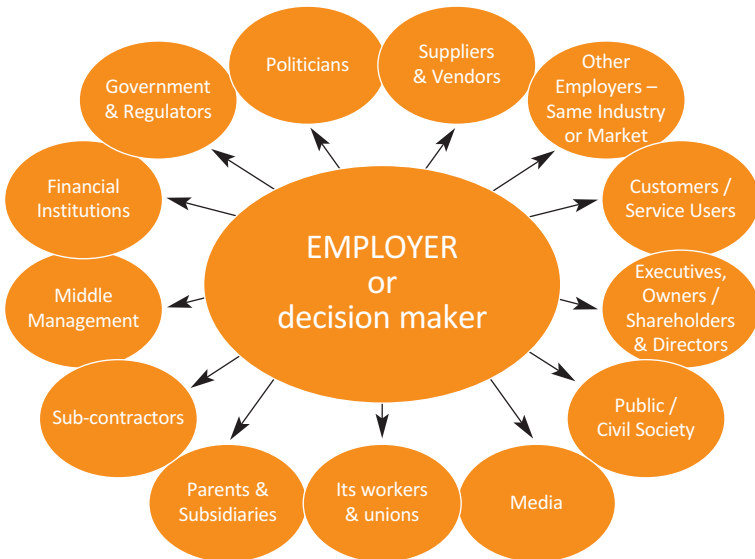
Once we have gathered this information, we will have a better

idea of how we might be able to put pressure on the employer. We might want to form a research committee of interested workers.

Often unions will only use their direct relationship with the employer to put pressure on the employer. In reality, there are many relationships that the employer has which may be more important to the employer than the union, especially when the union workers can be easily replaced.

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## WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE EMPLOYER'S KEY RELATIONSHIPS?



### **Learning from each other**

*The two largest school bus companies in the United States are both multinationals from the UK. We decided to focus our organising on the largest one, FirstGroup. We reached out to the ITF, and we were immediately linked up with Unite, the bus drivers' union in the UK.*

*Unite typically has over 90 per cent membership in FirstGroup. In the US, our membership at that time was very low. Almost every time the drivers tried to organise a union, the company would threaten them or shut down the work.*

*We were able to make direct contact between the US school bus drivers and the UK bus drivers. Both groups were shocked at the difference in treatment and conditions.*

*Many of the workers in the UK own shares in the company, and they, along with some institutional investors,*

*submitted a shareholders' resolution for a human rights policy that included workers' rights to organise.*

*Unite helped our drivers understand and make contact with UK parliamentarians, shareholders and the media. Together, we were able to use these key entities to persuade FirstGroup to adapt new policies.*

*When we began, we represented about 1,200 members at FirstGroup. Today we represent nearly 35,000 drivers in FirstGroup. Seeing the difference between how the workers in the UK [and the US] are treated has really motivated our folks to work harder so that we can get to the level with FirstGroup where we have a real working relationship. We have seen that this is possible – thanks to Unite and the ITF.*

**Tammy Edwards**  
ITF affiliate, USA

## INDUSTRY RESEARCH

### Learning from each other

*The ITF ports of convenience (POC) database is an information gathering and organising tool for dockers' affiliates to share research internationally on ports, terminal operators and their parent companies.*

*This research is being used to identify and support the organising and campaigning work of dockers' affiliates in the international POC campaign.*

**ITF dockers' section**

**The relationships that are the most significant to the employer are the ones that will be most important to our strategy.** Look for the relationships that are linked to current and future profit. If you have an elected decision maker, look for the relationships linked to current and future votes. For more in-depth information about how to put pressure on the employer, you will want to refer to the ITF Strategic Campaign Manual.

**In addition to understanding the employer or decision maker, we need to understand the industry in which they operate.**

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- \* Who are the main competitors?*
  - \* How does the employer fit into the global supply chain? Are there key hubs or transport operators that the employer is sensitive to?*
  - \* How does the employer or decision maker compare with others in the industry?*
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**The majority of transport workers in the world are informal workers, and informal work is an ever-growing part of the global economy.** Informal workers are those without a formal or standard employment relationship. They might be called unprotected, precarious, short-term contract, sub-contracted or contract workers. Informal workers might be self-employed or “falsely self-employed”. They may employ others but not be in control of their work or profits. They may not have a “job”, but they work.

**We find informal workers in all sectors of transport.** They might be seafarers, sub-contracted dock workers, taxi and bus drivers, flight attendants whose wage comes as a commission, railway ticket collectors, “porters” at the airports surviving on tips, or owner-drivers of trucks. They might be short-term contract workers, working right next to “normal” workers.

**Understanding the industry can motivate union members to assist with organising.** Union

members need to understand that their lack of participation can lessen what improvements the union is able to make.

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***If you are organising non-union workers:***

*\* In the past five years, how has the non-union sector affected union members?*

*\* In the next five years, how will the non-union sector affect union members?*

***If you are organising workers who have union representation:***

*\* In the past five years, how has workers’ lack of participation in the union affected working conditions for all workers?*

*\* In the next five years, how will workers’ lack of participation in the union affect working conditions for all workers?*

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The accompanying PowerPoint module on “Industry Research”

contains two activities that will help you analyse information about the employer’s key relationships and develop a research plan.