

Don't change a winning formula!

SA Labour Bulletin survey

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The *SA Labour Bulletin* is a unique publication which provides hardcore and up-to-date information on labour issues.

This is the opinion of corporate subscribers and policy-makers.

In the last issue of the *Bulletin* we reported on our survey of trade union readership. The *Bulletin* is also read by numerous other groups, including industrial relations managers and policy researchers.

Our second survey, conducted on our behalf by CASE

(Community Agency for Social Enquiry) concentrated on these readers. CASE researchers conducted 40 interviews,

half with corporate subscribers and half with policy decision-makers in state institutions, political parties, NGOs and research institutes.

Participants in the survey were asked :

- are they reading and/or using the *Bulletin*?
- what do they think of the format and content?
- what suggestions do they have for improvements?
- does the *Bulletin* carry enough information on issues relevant to policy-makers?

The study also looked at the role of the *Bulletin* in the context of the post-election changes in the country.

Who they are

Readers surveyed are mainly white men in their 40s. Most have a high level of education. The majority have a post-graduate degree. Apart from the *Bulletin*, they also read a wide variety of industrial relations publications. Their most popular newspaper is *Business Day*.

What they like

'Red Eye' is the most popular feature. This is followed by 'Profile' and the

'Labour law update'. Readers read the two-page briefings, labour notes and the international feature regularly.

The most popular topics are COSATU policy, the National Economic Forum (NEF), critiques of the labour movement and the government, as well as the relationship between the ANC and the labour movement.

Substantive reports are preferred. Corporate readers find the brief reports more useful, because of constraints on their time. Readers like articles on new topics or that shed new light on issues, especially concerning current affairs.

Readers feel that through the *SA Labour Bulletin* they gain a "privileged" insight into the workings of the labour movement.

This is especially true for corporate

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subscribers, who feel that the *Bulletin* gives them "the other side of the story".

These subscribers do not necessarily want the *Bulletin* to become more neutral – one reader summed it up as follows: "I don't want it to be more objective, I want it to be subjective – that is why I buy it."

Dislikes

Some readers see the *Bulletin* as biased, especially towards COSATU. The views of FEDSAL and NACTU are not sufficiently represented. It was noted, however, that this is also the consequence of COSATU being the biggest federation.

Some feel the *Bulletin* is too political. Three of the people interviewed said it was "too red"!

There were also criticisms of the overall layout, too much material on a page, cheap paper and lack of colour. But the readers said that if the *Bulletin* couldn't afford to improve this they would not stop buying it.

Content

No-one sees the content as dull – one corporate reader said "sometimes I think, jeez, who wrote this – how dare they say this!" While some felt the content is a bit predictable, on the whole it is seen as thought-provoking, relevant and useful.

Readers were asked whether they thought the *Bulletin* should change to a magazine format. Thirty eight out of the 40 interviewed thought the *Bulletin* should remain a journal. A corporate subscriber summed it up: "It is a successful publication, it has got a good profile and it is a journal of standing ... from my point of view I wouldn't change a winning formula."

The majority of policy makers (14 out of

20) feel the *Bulletin* does not carry enough information on policy matters. They would like to see the *Bulletin* tackle macro-economic issues (for example structure of the workforce, white papers on affirmative action and collective bargaining, national policy concerns such as the RDP) and practical economic issues (for example job creation schemes, education, training, technology, human resources, pension funds, labour market policy).

The *Bulletin* is seen as useful for industrial relations and research work and providing an understanding of labour relations and trade unions, but less useful in terms of policy decisions and understanding management's aims and objectives.

The role of trade unions

Readers were also asked their views on the role of trade unions in economic decision-making.

Almost all respondents agreed that trade unions should be involved in labour issues within companies, the drawing up of a national industrial relations policy, the drafting of a national education and training policy, national economic policy and wage issues. Most agreed that trade unions are legitimate representatives of employees. However, only half thought that trade unions should be involved in investment decisions.

The 'new' South Africa

Some readers feel the *Bulletin* should remain the same, but should concentrate particularly on the relationship between government and labour. Most agree the *Bulletin* should broaden its outlook, while remaining highly critical.

Above all, readers feel the *Bulletin* must remain independent and not protect the new government. ☆

