

12 EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS

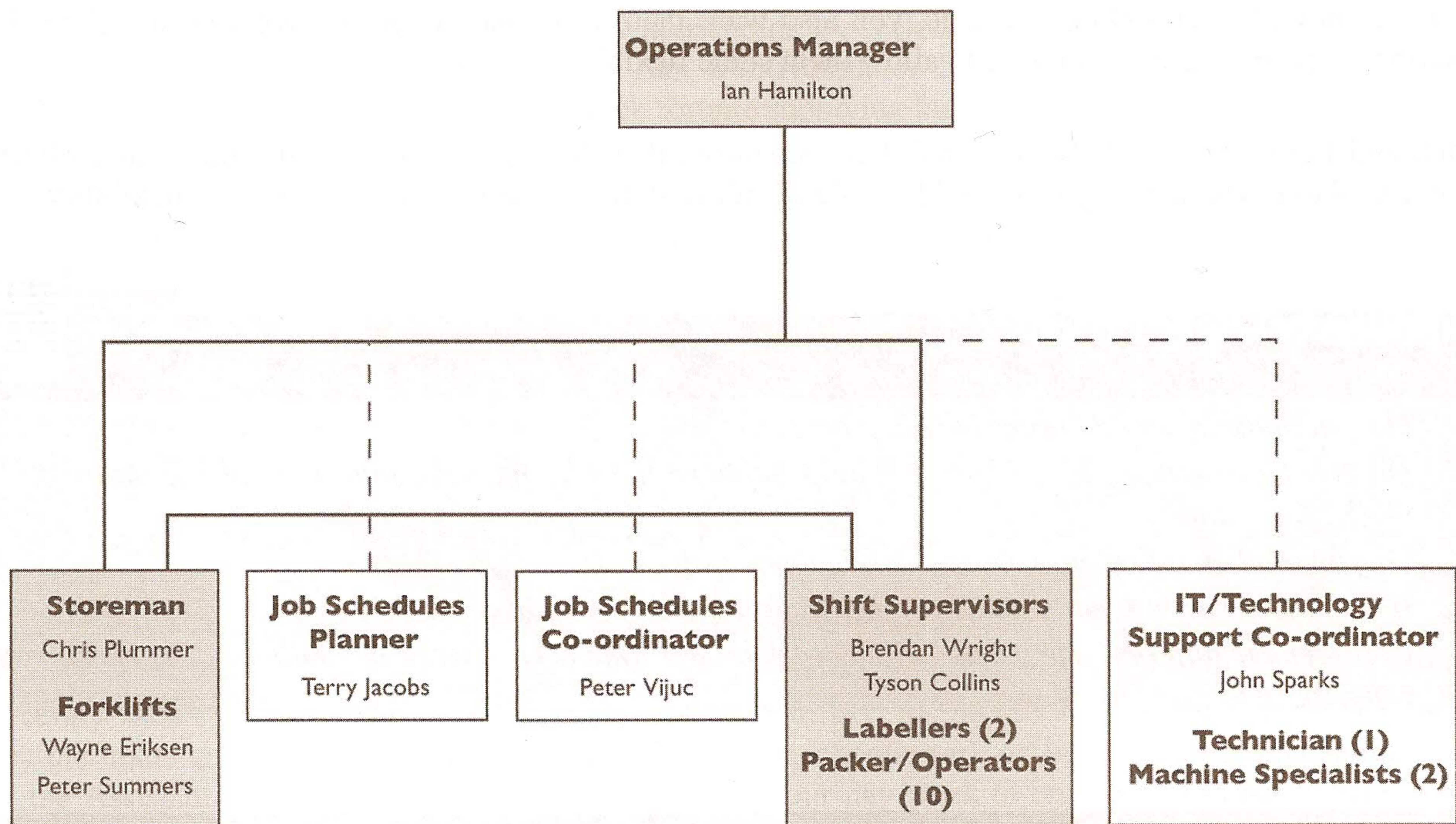


Figure 12.1 Organisational Chart – Melbourne Operations

QWIKMAIL/ DEVELOPMENTS



It was no secret that Brendan Wright and Tyson Collins were both disillusioned with Qwikmail. They had often complained to some of the others about the poor deal they had been given when Hamilton had effectively demoted them as Shift Supervisors (see Figure 12.1). They were now only in charge of a few Process Workers on the floor and many of their responsibilities had been taken from them by the restructure that had taken place.

They both felt they had received rough treatment and became increasingly despondent about their work. At times they both openly challenged the way things were done. From the recent performance appraisal Ian Hamilton had conducted with both men, it was evident that there was a significant drop in their performance.

But of greater concern was evidence that they were both beginning to stir up trouble on the factory floor. Occasionally, Ian had seen them moving among the operators chatting and had seen operators virtually pushing them away. There had even been a small number of complaints of harassment from a couple of Process Workers. Hamilton was becoming concerned that serious trouble was brewing. He spoke with both Wright and Collins but achieved nothing. If anything, they seemed to withdraw slightly and were very guarded in their responses to questions. He had also noticed them chatting with each other in the dock areas and in the car park.

Next door to Qwikmail's site, excavations were still being carried out in preparation for a new building. Excavation equipment began operating from early morning and noise levels and dust were becoming major problems, and in summer this was exacerbated by the heat. With the current work going on, the dust was particularly bad. Although efforts were taken to ensure one of the doors was always closed, having both the dock rolling door and the plastic doors between the dock and the processing floor open at the same time created a most unpleasant environment inside the factory.

Despite his work largely keeping him away from the dock area, Wright was still friendly with the Storeman and the Forklift Operators, to the extent that where possible he 'encouraged' them to leave all the doors open. This had the effect of upsetting many floor staff who then complained about the uncomfortable conditions.

On one particularly hot and windy afternoon, Ian Hamilton had retreated to the comfort of his office, when he received a knock at his door. The visitor was an official from the AMWU, in fact the same one who had visited the new factory when it was first opened. Hamilton had formed a good working relationship with him when the Melbourne site was being built and when it opened.

He warmly welcomed the official. However, he was most taken aback when the official advised him that, unless the environmental effects of the heat, noise and dust inside the factory were fixed immediately, there would be cause for industrial action to take place.