

## Chapter 2: The social nature of work

### OB in focus

#### *The working week: a matter of law?*

These days, people increasingly expect businesses to be open all hours – yet many companies are having to lay off workers as a result of a downturn in the global economy. As a result, staff are under increasing pressure to deliver more and work harder. Does the law need to intervene?

The European Union Working Time Directive states that working hours should not exceed 48 hours per week, which is causing problems in the UK, as the National Health Service struggles to comply with this rule and reduce doctors' working hours without compromising on care (1). Across the Channel in France, the much-vaunted 35 hour working week, introduced in 2000, has effectively been abolished under a new law passed in 2008 allowing companies to 'strike individual deals with unions on working hours and overtime'(2). Canada is grappling with similar issues as it considers whether middle managers (who are currently 'not covered by labour standards legislation' (3) should be offered protection.

What do *you* think? What role should the law, and trade unions, play in determining working conditions? Should these laws apply equally to all job types? Are there any cases where 'long hours come with the territory?' (3).

**Sources:** (1) 'Doctors warn over working rules', BBC news online, May 27, 2009. (2) 'MPs scrap France's 35-hour week', BBC news online, July 24, 2008. (3) Gate, V. (2005) 'Worn-out middle managers may get protection: Labour Code review could expand reach', *Globe and Mail*, January 3, p. B1.

