



GETTING PAST GO

A START-UP GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL WORKPLACE PARTNERSHIP

Getting Past Go is a collection of materials designed to help organisations explore the idea of workplace partnership. It's a basic introduction to what's involved in working together in partnership, and the benefits and challenges for organisations adopting this approach. We've gathered together information to help you get started and keep moving towards a more productive workplace relationship.



PARTNERSHIP

Partnership. *n.* a relationship between individuals or groups, characterised by mutual co-operation and responsibility, where the partners are working to achieve a specific goal.

WHAT IS WORKPLACE PARTNERSHIP?

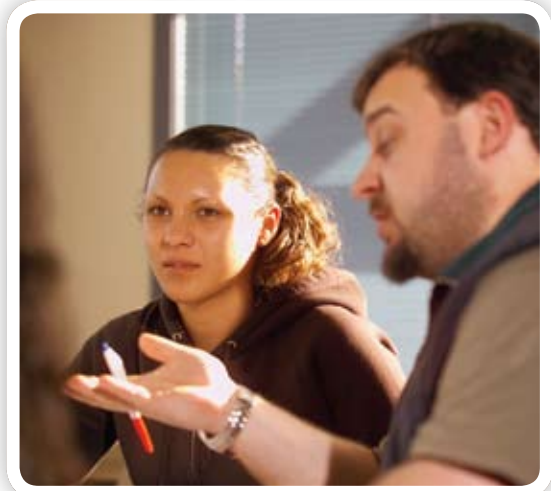
Workplace partnership is a modern approach to managing employment and industrial relations.

It describes an employer-union relationship where both partners are committed to supporting each other's interests, and actively working together in a mutually beneficial way.

Workplace partnership requires a respect for people and a willingness to do things differently. It's all about breaking down the old 'them and us' attitude and building a relationship based on co-operation, not conflict, even though differences remain. The emphasis is on mutual respect and a shared commitment to each other's success. The result is greater trust between the parties.

Adopting a partnership approach to doing business focuses everyone on what's best for the organisation as a whole, and what's required for long-term success. It's about asking, "How can the employer, union and staff start to work with each other to their mutual advantage?" and then coming up with some solutions.

To get there, an organisation needs to have effective information and participation processes, and to recognise that everyone – employers, staff and the union – has an equal part to play in building positive and productive workplace relationships.



WHY PARTNERSHIP? WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

If a workplace fails, everyone loses.

When employers, staff and their union representatives share common ground and work together in partnership, the conditions are created for everyone to win. Organisations that have successfully moved to a partnership approach have seen the benefits:

- Improved employee relations
- A more positive and satisfying workplace culture
- Greater job satisfaction and more opportunities for personal and career development
- Motivated staff who are able to participate in the decisions that affect them
- Reduced workplace conflict and tension



- Increased confidence, trust and openness in people
- The ability to constructively work through change and conflict
- Greater job security and the potential for wages to rise with productivity
- Easier staff recruitment and increased staff retention rates
- Shared ownership of business outcomes and results
- Increased profits, productivity, innovation and efficiency
- Improvements in work processes and service delivery
- Better business performance and long-term viability.



PARTNERSHIP WORKS

Internationally, countries that have supported and adopted a partnership approach have seen the results. In Ireland, partnership has helped to turn around decades of workplace conflict, stagnation and decline, and transformed the Irish economy into one of the best performing economies in the world. Ireland is seeing the benefits of partnership, including reduced unemployment, rising wages and higher living standards.

One study in the United Kingdom showed that adopting partnership effectively reduced operating costs by 30 percent, halved the breakeven point and improved quality by 30 percent.

MAKING IT WORK FOR YOU – WHAT'S REQUIRED?

There are five key attributes common to organisations that have achieved successful workplace partnership. Each of these presents a critical dilemma for the organisation. How you deal with these dilemmas can determine your ability to make partnership work.

› Workplace Relationships

The aim is to move away from an employer-union relationship based on self-interest and conflict, to one based on mutual interest and partnership, while retaining independence and difference. The dilemma here is how to uncover 'mutual interest' when you may have only seen and experienced each other's distinctly different and conflicting interests and views.

› Leadership

Partnership requires leaders across the organisation to commit to the values of partnership and adopt a partnership approach to the management of the business and its people. The dilemma here is often about our perceptions of power – who has it, and who needs it? How do leaders and managers include others in organisational decision-making without feeling like they are relinquishing power and control?

› Communication

For partnership to happen, there must be effective and open communication at all levels of the organisation, and between everyone – employers, staff and the union. The dilemma here is how to keep a clear and consistent focus when there is open and widespread communication.

“
Adopting a partnership is not without its challenges.”

› **Morale And Motivation**

Workplace morale is positive, and all staff, including management, are motivated and supported to work together in partnership. The dilemma here is that engagement and control are often mutually exclusive. But many organisations attempt to use control rather than leadership as a tool, to ensure people's support and participation.

› **Capability and Capacity**

Staff, unions and employers have the capability (skills and knowledge) and the capacity (resources – people, time and money) to build and sustain a partnership. The dilemma here is how to justify investing in capacity and capability, when there is often little immediate financial benefit or impact on the organisation or the union's short-term survival.

To make partnership work, both the organisation and the union need to demonstrate these five attributes. This means being prepared to adapt your current workplace practices and manage the partnership dilemmas as they come up. Partnership requires commitment, a willingness to do things differently and, most importantly, respect and recognition of each other's views and interests.

PARTNERSHIP – THE CHALLENGES

Like all good relationships, a successful workplace partnership requires active participation and an ongoing commitment to work at it.

Sometimes it's easy for the relationship to lose momentum and get off-track, or for those in the relationship to become frustrated with how things are progressing and lose sight of one another's needs.

To avoid disappointment or frustration, be realistic about what you expect to achieve from the partnership. You must expect that building consensus will take real effort and anticipate that, at times, it may be challenging, difficult and frustrating.

An effective partnership relies on a long-term commitment to making it work, realistic expectations and regular evaluation of the relationship and how it's going. It's important to set up the processes to support the partnership and address any hiccups or difficulties you face along the way.

Adopting a partnership is not without its challenges. That's why others have found that having the support of a third party, like the Partnership Resource Centre, has enabled them to overcome the challenges and keep moving forward. Seeking help also shows that you're committed to making a real success of partnership.

SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP – WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

When you build a successful partnership, you'll see a real change in your organisation:

- Management, staff and unions will have greater confidence and trust in each other.
- There will be openness and good faith between the partners and staff.
- Decision-making will happen through consultation and participation.
- People across the organisation will have the skills, knowledge and resources to work in partnership.
- An organisation will be able to constructively deal with a range of issues and work through any change, tension or conflict.

A successful partnership works to achieve common goals, but it doesn't require the parties to give up their own identities. Managers will still manage, and the union will continue to be the voice of the workers. Despite partnership, there will still be disagreements – that's natural and unavoidable – but, in time, you'll see a noticeable reduction in conflict and disagreement.

Did you know?

Partnership is relatively new to New Zealand. Only a few organisations have successfully led the way and adopted partnership, and they're seeing real results.

But unions and employers here are supportive of a partnership approach to union-management relationships, believing it benefits employees and employers:

- 86 percent of union officials were prepared, to some extent, to engage with employers in workplace partnerships, on a reciprocal basis.
- On average, one in three employers are interested in partnership-type approaches with unions, and 40 percent – or two in five employers – believe partnership is likely to help New Zealand business.
- 88 percent of union officials believe that unions and employers have more common interests than they have conflicting interests.

Source: 2005 research study on Workplace Partnership in New Zealand

Things to think about

Before you move on, here are some key things to think about:

1. Is partnership right for you – what would partnership look like in your organisation and what do you expect to achieve?
2. What is the current state of employer-union relationships in your organisation?
3. Are you ready to adopt a partnership approach to relationships? If not, what obstacles are in your way, and what can you do to remove them?
4. What resources will you need – do employers, staff and the union have the capacity and capability to make a partnership work?

Moving forward

- Read the other Getting Past Go materials to learn more about partnership.
- Talk with the Partnership Resource Centre and find out how they can help and support you to explore how partnership could work for you.
- Take a look at the **Workplace Partnerships: Diagnostic Toolkit**. It can guide you through the things to think about in a more structured way.

Find out more

- **National Centre for Partnership and Performance (Ireland)** www.ncpp.ie
- **TUC Partnership Institute (UK)** www.tuc.org.uk/partnership
- **Involvement and Partnership Association (UK)** www.ipa-involve.com

Partnership Resource Centre publications are available on our website or you can contact us for hard copies.

- **Workplace Partnership in New Zealand: A stocktake of practice.** A 2005 report on partnership practices, attitudes and behaviours in New Zealand.
- **International Experiences of Partnership.** A 2006 review of partnership practices in Denmark, Ireland, Norway and the United Kingdom.
- Case studies on the partnership experiences of Asure NZ, Fisher & Paykel, and Winstone Pulp.

PARTNERSHIP RESOURCE CENTRE

The Partnership Resource Centre provides advice on workplace partnership projects. The Centre has a team of independent associates who have extensive knowledge and experience in industrial relations and organisational development. Our Associates work alongside employers, unions and staff and help them develop constructive workplace partnerships, improve partnership practices, or work through particular problems. Contact us to find out more about partnership and what we can do to help you.

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