



# 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.

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### CAPABILITY AND CAPACITY

**Capability and capacity.** *n.* the ability, skill and resources needed to do something.

Partnership in action requires you to have the skills, knowledge, attitudes, time and resources to build a culture of problem-solving and innovation. If you want to succeed at partnership, each of the partners must have the capacity and capability to make the relationship work.

Having the right capability is important. Partners must have the skills and knowledge necessary to engage effectively with each other in a new way and build the long-term relationship. They must also be capable of moving beyond a conventional – sometimes confrontational – way of relating to each other to try a new and different approach.

Any gaps or weaknesses in the current capability of the partners need to be identified and addressed through dialogue, knowledge-building, up-skilling, training, coaching and mentoring.

Having the right capability is just one half of the equation. Partners also need the capacity to make the relationship work. Capacity means having the time, resources and the right people available to participate in the partnership and develop the structures and processes necessary to make a long-term partnership work.

#### ADAPTING FOR PARTNERSHIP

Partnerships can be resource intensive. They not only require people to engage in partnership discussion, but they typically



need skills training and additional capacity to support the partners to build new partnership processes and structures. Your organisation may need to respond to this by investing time and resources into building the capability and capacity needed for partnership.

Capacity and capability on their own won't make a partnership successful. They need to exist alongside the other key attributes of successful partnership – leadership, effective communication, relationship building, morale and motivation.



Once you've built the capabilities you need, and the partners have the resources they need to practise partnership, this new way of working together can quickly become 'the way we do things around here'. When this happens, your organisation will have modified the workplace culture and adapted for partnership.



### **BUILDING THE CAPABILITY TO SUPPORT PARTNERSHIP**

A partnership approach implies greater employee involvement. This can be challenging for managers more used to managerial control of decision-making. Union representatives are also more familiar with the 'us and them' approach to working together. For both partners, it's often easier to take a firm stance on an issue rather than look for solutions that will work for everyone. For many managers, supervisors and union representatives, there is a lot to un-learn and re-learn.

Some of the key capabilities needed to develop a partnership are effective communication skills, facilitation techniques and the ability to analyse

issues and make joint decisions. You may find that the groups or individuals engaged in the partnership lack some of these skills. If so, you will need to build your collective capability to make the relationship work long-term. Focused training, combined with practice in solving real workplace issues, will help partners develop these skills over time.

Having managers and union representatives skilled in joint engagement and problem-solving processes is one of the key attributes necessary to make a success of partnership. Structured partnership discussions and processes, combined with learning new 'engagement' skills, will give everyone the best possible chance of making the partnership work.

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## INVESTING IN THE CAPACITY NEEDED FOR PARTNERSHIP

To succeed at building a partnership, you will most likely need to make extra time, resources and people available. The amount of extra resource you will need will be influenced by the scope of the partnership exercise and the complexity of the organisation. But regardless of scale and scope, it's not a process that is easily squeezed into an organisation's existing daily routines. To accommodate your partnership, you may need to reprioritise your existing workplace activities and find additional resources.

Most organisational change processes will require you to invest in the things you need to support and sustain the change. Partnership is no different. It's important to embed this new way of working into the day-to-day business operations.

## THE INVESTMENT DILEMMA

Most organisations and unions have limited resources, and partnership requires investment of some of these resources – time, energy and often money – into building a successful long-term relationship. The dilemma is that there may be no immediate benefit or return on this investment. In the short term, your efforts at partnership won't get an order out on time, help you recruit new members, deal with an immediate commercial threat, or win you new business. How do you invest money and enable people to step away from their day-to-day activities to build a partnership, when there is no immediate financial gain?

## SUCCESS – WHAT SHOULD YOU AIM FOR?

With the capabilities in place, and the capacity there to make partnership work, you'll notice immediate differences in the way people engage with each other. When you start to work through problems and issues together in a more constructive way, you may be surprised by what you learn about yourselves, each other and the organisation.

When everyone has the skills and resources to commit to partnership, you'll also find it becomes easier to keep morale up and maintain people's motivation levels. When you address capacity and capability, you'll find that building and sustaining a strong partnership is much more achievable. Staff will become more capable and begin to apply their new skills to their work. You'll also have a better chance of achieving and sustaining the levels of performance your organisation is capable of.

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## 👉 Did you know?

Partnership can create more opportunities for staff and union representatives to develop their skills and move into managerial roles. This is one of the many positive outcomes for organisations that adopt a workplace partnership approach. With this in mind, it's important to be aware that, as people move into new roles in the organisation, you need to support them to acquire the skills and capabilities they need to be successful.

## 👉 Find out more

- **Cracking the Performance Code: How Firms Succeed.**

Stephan Bevan [www.theworkfoundation.com](http://www.theworkfoundation.com)

The Partnership Resource Centre's case studies on the partnership experiences of Asure NZ, Fisher & Paykel, and Winstone Pulp are available on our website or you can contact us for copies.

## 👉 Things to think about

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

1. Have you identified the skills and capabilities that you'll need to develop a successful workplace partnership?
2. Are you able to invest in building capability in your organisation to support workplace partnership?
3. Are you prepared to make the time, resources and people available to ensure individuals and groups can actively participate in partnership building activities?
4. Are you prepared to take some risk and explore different ways of working 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 move towards partnership.
- Take a look at the **Workplace Partnerships: Diagnostic Toolkit**. It can help you explore your current capacity and capability, identify gaps and assess your readiness for partnership.

## 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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