



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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LEADERSHIP

Leadership. *n.* the act of leading, inspiring, guiding and directing a person or group.

Effective leadership is one of the five key attributes common to organisations that have achieved successful workplace partnership, and good leadership is critical if an organisation wants to move towards a partnership relationship model.

A successful partnership can only happen when there is a commitment from leaders across the organisation – the union and the employer. The initial commitment is often to instigate and support a workplace partnership project in your organisation.

Leadership under a partnership model is inclusive and empowering. It is a style of leadership where people lead by learning and doing, not by blaming. Leaders must demonstrate trust and respect across the wider workplace.

WHAT KIND OF LEADERSHIP HINDERS PARTNERSHIP?

For partnership to work, an organisation must be willing to learn, adapt and explore new ways of working. Do the leaders in your organisation support organisational learning? If not, succeeding at partnership will be difficult.

Organisational learning is often held back in the workplace when leaders exhibit certain characteristics. Most commonly, this type of leadership is authoritarian or paternalistic. Leaders will look to impose their perspective on how things are done, rather than allow an



agreed perspective to emerge. When different perspectives are stifled, innovation is stifled.

ADAPTING LEADERSHIP FOR PARTNERSHIP

Leadership in a workplace partnership is not about 'command' and 'control', or having a single source of authority. Successful partnerships happen when leaders across the wider organisation – employers, staff and the union – are empowered to lead the organisation on a path that everyone has agreed on. The role of the organisation's leaders is to create a workplace environment where this can happen.



In organisations where partnership is working, there are some distinctly different approaches to leadership:

- Traditionally, leaders have provided answers and created certainty. Under partnership, leaders will also ask questions and inspire curiosity. Solutions will emerge not just from leaders but also from within and across the organisation.
- Change happens less often through compliance, but with everyone in the workplace committed to and willing to make things work. Leaders are effective at cultivating support for change in the organisation, not just managing it.



A shift from a traditional 'command and control' style of leadership to the kind of leadership that enables partnership requires a careful and well thought out approach, and the approach will be different for different organisations. The key thing is to adopt a leadership style that inspires confidence, hope and optimism across the organisation.

MAKING IT WORK – THE CHALLENGES

Facilitating change through a culture of commitment rather than compliance poses challenges for both employers and the union.

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Many of these challenges are to do with individual attitudes and assumptions about leadership, and they are surprisingly similar for both parties.

To make partnership work, leaders need to start by displaying the change they want others across the organisation to adopt. It's about 'walking the talk' not just 'talking the talk'. To do this, union and employer leaders need to explore how their current attitudes, assumptions and beliefs drive their workplace behaviours, and whether these behaviours support or undermine a partnership approach. Leaders must look at how they impact on others in the organisation and identify what they can do better.

Any past negative experiences will inform the assumptions employers and union leaders have about each other and what the future will be like. Sometimes, the assumption is that 'we can't work together because we haven't done so successfully in the past'. To move forward, you'll need to understand why things haven't worked in the past and what needs to change to ensure you don't repeat the same mistakes.

Leaders may need to develop their interpersonal skills, particularly in the areas of empathy, conflict resolution and team building. It's important that this work is done, otherwise it's easy for leaders to revert back to an unproductive leadership style, despite wanting to change the way they lead the organisation.

THE LEADERSHIP DILEMMA

This dilemma here is largely about power – who has it, who needs it, and how much? Successful partnership requires leaders to redefine the boundaries of power in the organisation, and this can prove challenging. Employers and managers may be concerned that decision-making will be slow and that they'll need to get everyone's okay to do anything – effectively giving up their right to manage. Union leaders may be concerned about taking on management's job and being coerced into supporting the employer's agenda.

In a partnership, managerial prerogative is used less as a justification for decisions, but this doesn't mean power is transferred to union leaders – rather, the employer and the union need to work together to empower the organisation itself. Careful design of the organisation's decision-making processes and the setting of clear boundaries can help you tackle the leadership dilemma.

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP – WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Effective leadership is about empowering people. Leadership supports workplace partnership when it empowers everyone in the organisation to work together to make the organisation succeed. When it's working, you'll see a real change in how things happen:

- Leaders ask more questions and actively seek input from across the organisation – staff and union representatives.

- Leaders apply their efforts to thinking about what questions and opportunities need to be explored, and how to use the ideas of those in the organisation to the benefit of everyone.
- Leaders will create formal and informal ways for people across the organisation to communicate and work together.
- Mutual respect and trust will grow, and union and employer leaders will consult each other more because they value each other's perspectives.
- Any negative perceptions and attitudes in the organisation are surfaced and addressed, not ignored or driven underground.
- People feel listened to – contributions and opinions are welcome.
- There is a shared vision of the future, and everyone is working together to get there.

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Successful partnerships happen when leaders – employers, staff and the union – are empowered to lead the organisation.

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Did you know?

Recent research carried out by the University of Auckland discovered that “the New Zealand leader is unlikely to encourage and acknowledge different points of view, has low self-awareness and is resistant to change”.

That doesn't paint a very good picture. The research found that, in environments where there was very little 'authentic leadership', the workforce was stripped of the very qualities important for success – creativity, innovation, risk-taking, openness and a connection to the aspirations of the organisation.

Source: More Right than Real: The Shape of Authentic Leadership in New Zealand, University of Auckland 2007.

Find out more

- **The Seven-Day Weekend.** Ricardo Semler, Penguin
- **The Fifth Discipline.** Peter Senge, Currency
- **The Living Company. Habits for survival in a turbulent business environment.** Arie de Geus, Harvard Business School Press
- **Goodbye Command and Control.** Margaret Wheatley
www.margaretwheatley.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. Could the partnership style of leadership happen in your organisation?
2. What challenges do you think your organisation might face moving to a partnership style of leadership?
3. Do leaders in your workplace understand the difference between management and leadership?
4. Do you have a clear idea of the skills and qualities effective leaders need to have?

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 assess the perceptions about leadership in your workplace and identify where the strengths and weaknesses in the current leadership style lie.

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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