



Employment Issues

Labor-Management Cooperation

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General Information

Recent surveys of employees disclose their willingness to improve their performance and productivity and their desire to provide input into management decisions affecting their jobs and future. American managers recognize the necessity for maximizing collaboration, increasing the quality of their products or services, profits, employees' compensation and job security and reducing workplace stress, turnover, grievances and work stoppages. As Professor Karl E. Klare put it, "efficiency is simply too important to be left to management . . . Democracy is not only desirable for its own sake. It also makes good business sense."

Today, there are thousands of labor-management cooperative programs in place at unionized and nonunion companies, including self-managed employee work teams, quality circles, joint special project task forces, performance-based or gain-sharing reward programs, union-management human resources policy or planning councils and others. Eighty percent of our 1,000 largest publicly held corporations have some type of employee incentive program. Labor-management cooperation pledges are found in 57 percent of today's union contracts, a large portion establishing committees to deal with specific problems such as absenteeism, productivity or health insurance cost [control](#).¹ Leading Iowa companies, including Wellmark Blue Cross Blue Shield of Iowa, the Principal Group and Rolscreen Co. have cooperative programs.

Experts agree no cooperative program can succeed unless top management expresses a firm commitment to employee and/or union participation. The following illustrate private sector policies or contract provisions:

1. **Dayton-Hudson Corporation** To provide an atmosphere that encourages employee initiative and input and which fosters trust, creativity and economic security.
2. **Intel Corporation** Open (constructive) confrontation is encouraged at all levels of the corporation and is viewed as a method of problem solving. Decision by consensus is the rule.
3. **Xerox Corporation**
 - a. Involves employees in discussions about work-related issues.
 - b. Utilizes employees' skills and individual strengths.
 - c. Solicits ideas from employees.
 - d. Guides team decisions to match overall organizational objectives.
 - e. Helps teams develop a common understanding of the problems and objectives they face.
 - f. Involves employees in decision-making.
 - g. Encourages employees toward cooperation rather than competition.
 - h. Establishes a climate of openness and trust.
4. **Saturn Corporation**
 - a. Recognizes efforts of everyone in the organization.
 - b. Provides free flow of information and clear definition of the decision-making process.
 - c. Places authority and decision-making in the most appropriate part of the

organization, with emphasis on the work teams.

- d. Uses the consensus decision-making process.

Other ingredients of a successful cooperative program are:

- a. The union's commitment to organizational effectiveness.
- b. Management's understanding a program designed merely to eliminate the union or undercut the collective bargaining agreement will fail.
- c. Management's commitment that union or employees' suggestions will not be used to reduce staff.
- d. A mutual understanding that trust and risk-taking are essential for success.
- e. Members of the organization must be trained in team building, communications and human resources techniques.
- f. Management must share financial and operational information with employees and/or the union.
- g. In the early stages, select a pilot project with attainable goals.
- h. Publicize the success of the program throughout the organization.

Some examples of the wide variety of cooperative programs in the private sector are as follows:

1. At Saturn Corporation's plant in Spring Hill, Tennessee, workers' groups are responsible for work scheduling, employees' assignments, inventory, safety, training and maintenance. The United Auto Workers' representatives helped design the vehicle and assembly line, helped select Saturn's dealers and are involved in long-range corporate planning.
2. At Union Camp Corporation in St. Louis, employees assisted in preparing job descriptions, training procedures and performance standards.
3. Employees at Johnsonville Foods of Sheboygan, Wisconsin, operate the firm's quality control program, dealing directly with suppliers, retailers and customers; designed a pay-for-performance system;

and made the decision to add a new product line, determining the necessary machinery and manpower.

4. Teams of workers at Federal Express in Memphis saved millions of dollars by redesigning the company's sorting, delivery and billing systems.
5. In Rockford, Illinois, the Woodward Governor Company has vertical committees of workers and managers making recommendations on benefit plans and semi-annual bonuses, which are based on peer evaluations.
6. At TRW's facility in Lawrence, Kansas, self-managed teams of employees hire, discipline and evaluate their fellow workers.
7. The current AT&T Communications Workers contract contains four levels of cooperation, including a "human resources board" to address major strategic employee relations and business issues.
8. The labor agreement between an Iowa defense industry manufacturer and the Pattern Makers Union, which represents a highly skilled group of employees, provides company officials will meet with employees monthly to discuss pattern shop operations, equipment materials, production schedules, and methods of production or employees' suggestions regarding such matters in order to improve the productivity and efficiency of the department. The company shall respond to any such suggestions by the next monthly meeting.

A number of school corporations and local associations throughout the country have sought an alternative to confrontational negotiations. The "win-win" model (or interest-based bargaining) focuses on shared interests and collaboration. Questions (or concepts) are posed for discussion, rather than specific proposals. All members of both teams participate. Subcommittees are often used to study an issue and recommend a resolution to the teams. After agreement in principle is reached, language is drafted and jointly finalized. A pre-set time frame for collaborative bargaining is often established. Sometimes the parties use a facilitator who, unlike a mediator, guides the parties through the process, rather than suggesting substantive solutions. Collaborative negotiations more often succeed when the parties have a mature working

relationship. There are no guarantees collaborative bargaining will be quicker, cheaper or more productive than traditional negotiations.

A number of reform projects, including *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* in 1986 and *Tomorrow's Teachers*, also in 1986, recommended educators become more involved in teacher training, monitoring and building-level decisions. The National School Boards Association's *Commission on New Communication in Public School Educational Operations* identified four effective methods which promoted collegial working relationships between teachers and school boards:

1. Advisory communications (meaningful input).
2. Teacher recognition programs (including monetary and psychic rewards).
3. Alternative negotiating techniques.
4. Decentralized decision-making (for example, shared decisions on school curriculum, budgets or discipline policies).

Some examples of cooperative programs for schools include:

1. Teachers are given release time to meet with administrators in Falmouth, Massachusetts, to set goals and evaluation criteria, established outside the collective bargaining process.
2. In Chandler, Arizona, the superintendent holds monthly breakfast meetings with 30 professional and classified employees on various topics.
3. Administrators and several board members in Fargo, North Dakota, meet with groups of teachers every month, away from the bargaining table, to discuss such permissive subjects of bargaining as class size, student discipline and school finance.
4. Negotiations between Westport, Connecticut, schools and an NEA affiliate established a "teacher leader" classification, paying 5 percent over the salary schedule, for mentors.
5. The board and teacher association in Glen Ellen, Illinois, changed the bargaining process after years of using the adversarial model. The parties set aside three months to reach agreement; expanded their teams to 15 members; had meetings alternately

chaired by board and association leaders; and used seven subcommittees to focus on specific issues for five weeks. An early settlement resulted.

6. The cooperative bargaining process between the Vermillion, South Dakota, board and an NEA affiliate begins with focusing on an agreed set of financial data that is worked up by an outside accountant and the business manager. Negotiations have been concluded in four sessions.
7. The "Career in Teaching Program" negotiated by the board and an AFT affiliate in Rochester, New York, established four tiers, with 10 percent of the staff who had 10 years of service and top performance ratings designated as lead teachers (among the highest paid U.S. teachers). These teachers function as mentors, intervention teachers and instructional leaders. The association agreed to extend the school year to 190 days and to a remedial program conducted by lead teachers.
8. In Richardson, Texas, site-based committees of building administrators, teachers and parents develop school plans and budgets for their [schools](#).²

Several important questions about labor-management cooperative programs should be addressed:

Q: What is the best model or system?

A: There is no one "best" or "correct" system. Whatever system is consistent with your corporation's goals and objectives and makes sense to you, your staff and association is what you should use.

Q: Won't the association be more cooperative if we agree to negotiate all subjects, mandatory and permissive?

A: Negotiating such topics as class size, the school calendar or the employment of principals is extremely complex; recognize this concept at the outset.

Q: Some cooperative programs, particularly in the private sector, appear to involve co-determination of issues. Is this wise?

A: In the vast majority of shared decision-making programs, employees and/or unions

are given input, not a veto power. In addition, Iowa's educational and bargaining laws mandate the public employer retain the "exclusive power" to, for example, determine its budget, direct its employees' work and take necessary actions to carry out its mission.

- Q:** Don't many cooperative plans provide employees with guaranteed job security?
- A:** Most do not, but a few permit layoffs only in cases of "unforeseen or catastrophic events or a severe economic downturn." The Iowa law is not so restrictive, permitting layoffs "for lack of work or for other legitimate reasons." No employer can guarantee job security for any employee, supervisor or manager.

Employee Attitude Surveys

One way a school corporation can increase labor-management cooperation is by using an employee attitude survey. (See example in the sample forms section) In most cases, an employee attitude survey is simply a questionnaire asking employees what aspects of their job they like or dislike. The survey can also contain questions on job security, opportunities for advancement, and satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the employee's immediate supervisor or with other management representatives. Employees are not typically required to list their names on the survey to encourage complete and honest responses.

Management can use the results of the survey to evaluate its work policies and procedures and assess its own work performance. The results can also be used to determine if worker satisfaction would increase if management cooperated more with its employees and gave the employees a greater voice in running the operation.

Conducting employee attitude surveys does not present any legal ramifications, provided the employees the school corporation intends to survey are not part of a certified bargaining unit. If the employees are part of a certified unit, the school corporation arguably commits an unfair labor practice if it unilaterally surveys or "polls" the employees regarding the terms and conditions of their employment. A joint school corporation/association attitude survey may overcome an unfair labor practice. A school corporation should consult its employee relations counsel before conducting any employee attitude survey of its organized workforce.

Endnotes

1. [*Basic Patterns in Union Contracts*](#) 84, BNA Books (13th Ed. 1992).
2. [*National School Boards Association, Communicating Charge: Working Towards Educational Excellence Through New and Better School District Communications*](#) 9-24 (1988) and City of Iowa City, 1979 PERB 1321; Akron Community School District, 1978 PERB 116