

Our Approach to Building Workplace Partnerships between Management and Unions

South African society has a history of conflict and adversarialism at almost every level. And the miracle of South Africa is that through the leadership of Nelson Mandela and other great South Africans it has been able to create a relatively peaceful and stable society. Nonetheless that peace is fragile and the threat of violence and conflict resides just below the surface and like a volcano occasionally erupts resulting in pain and suffering most particularly for the less advantaged members of society. One of the abiding flashpoints for conflict is the workplace where management and unions continue to exist in permanent tension with each other.

The question we ask is whether conflict and violence is inevitable or can parties in the workplace find a different way of engaging with one another this will lead to a transformed relationship and mutually beneficial outcomes?

Our answer is yes. This yes is not based on theoretical conjecture but on real experiences in workplaces where the commitment and hard work of stakeholders has resulted in a measurably different way of doing things and resulted in much more pleasing outcomes for all concerned.

Einstein's is reputed to have coined the following definition of insanity: If we keep on doing the same thing and expecting different results we are simply insane.

What is needed is a different approach, a different paradigm. A way of doing things that requires both different inputs and attitudes and results in fundamentally transformed relationships and outcomes.

Historically workplace relationships have been largely based on the exercise of power, sometimes dictatorially, sometimes paternalistically, and sometimes benevolently. The assumptions of the power paradigm are that the more senior you are, the more power you have, the more important you are, the more you know, and the more you should get paid. This is simply not true in the modern world. Widespread access to information and the ability to communicate effectively using telecommunications and social media has

levelled the playing field considerably, and heralded the need for a different workplace paradigm. In short, this power paradigm is becoming increasingly obsolete in the post industrial world.

The alternative we propose a Partnership Paradigm. In its simplest form this paradigm views the workplace as a collaboration between people based on common interests.

- What is required is a different set of outcomes to the engagement between the parties.
- Different outcomes can only be achieved by applying a different way of thinking which leads to doing things differently
- Learning to do things differently requires at least the following:
 - A different approach based largely on common interests without ignoring divergent interests
 - A different commitment from parties to a journey of learning and engagement rather than an event. Learning to partner does not happen overnight. Old behaviours need to be “unlearned”, new behaviours need to be established. This takes time.
 - A different institutional framework with a founding document that emphasises a new way of doing things based on collaboration, dialogue and problem solving
 - A clear agreed plan with objectives, actions and time frames to achieve the different outcomes desired by the parties
 - A different set of competencies - partnering and collaborating requires a whole new set of competencies if it is to work
 - A different kind of leadership - leadership that inspires, encourages, supports and enables the different way of doing things in order to achieve a different set of outcomes

The Values of Partnership

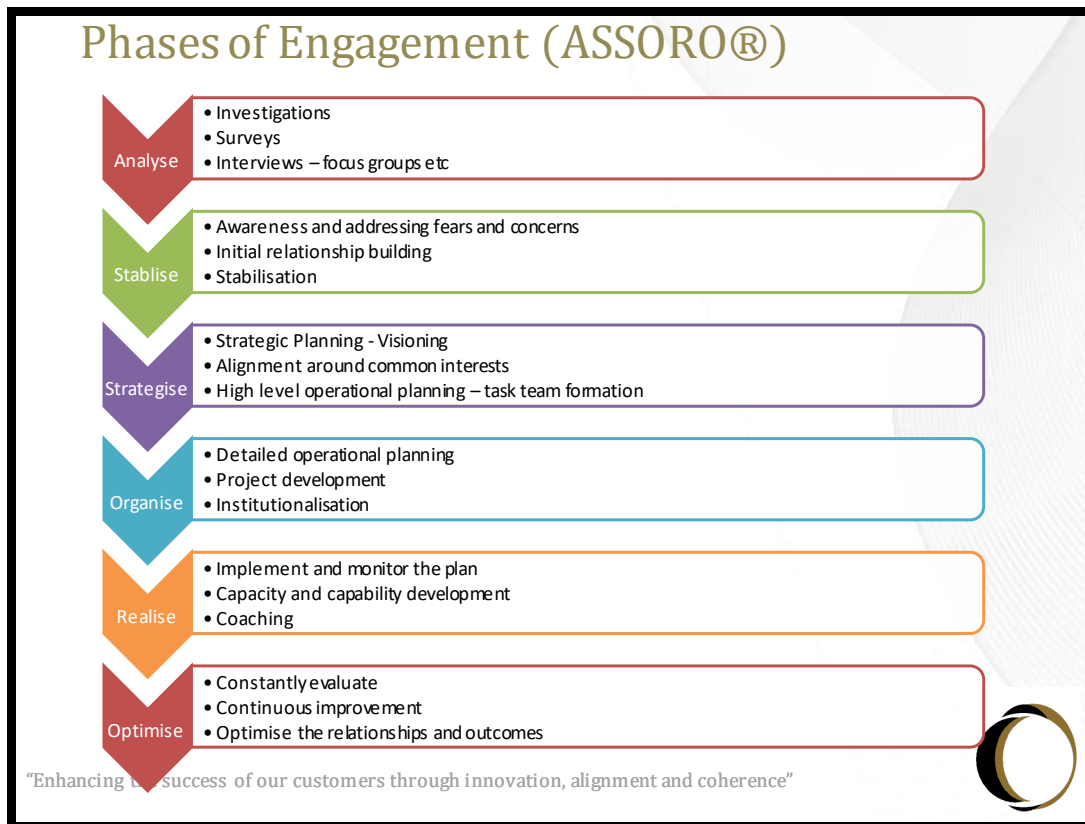
Values and culture define human behaviour. This is true both individually and organisationally. Our experience has shown that a particular set of values is necessary for the Partnership Paradigm to work.

- Partnership can only occur between people who view each other as equals. This is the essence of mutual respect. It is based on the philosophy that we cannot do this without each other.

- Partnership respects each stakeholder's independent interests, and seeks also to advance their shared interests and the advantages to be derived from mutual gains. This is embodied in the concept of the mutuality of interests where both the common and divergent interests of all parties are taken into consideration in every engagement. For example: In Management-Union Partnerships the partnership seeks to both strengthen the ability of Management to manage the Company and the ability of the Union to effectively represent its members.
- Key values in the expression of Partnership are:
 - Listening to employees and the communities from which they are drawn
 - Dialogue with employees and communities
 - Problem solving
 - Offering guidance
 - Sharing information
 - Developing and empowering people
 - Acknowledging and rewarding good performance

The Path to Partnership: The Journey of Engagement (ASSORO®)

At the risk of repetition: Partnership is a journey and every journey has its own specific characteristics. Nonetheless in our work we have been able to identify a range of phases through which the journey must go it is to be sustainable. Not all partnership journeys will necessarily follow the phases in the same order and in others some phases may not be necessary. The diagram below provides a graphic representation of the journey that the development of partnerships may follow:



Again these phases are not the result of an academic exercise but are based on our actual experiences in numerous workplaces. Each of these phases seeks to achieve the outcomes below:

ANALYSE – this is where our facilitators seek to understand the situation, surface fears and concerns, identify possibilities and seek to enable a shared perception of the situation amongst the parties

STABILISE – In this phase we seek to create the condition under which parties are able to engage with each other in strategising towards mutually desired different outcomes

STRATEGISE – In this phase we assist parties to co-craft an agreed strategy to achieve mutually desired outcomes from a different kind of relationship

ORGANISE – Here we support the organisation in doing necessary planning and organisational development to maximise the potential for the success of Partnership

REALISE – In this phase we support organisations to realise the benefits of Partnership through effective implementation and competency development

OPTIMISE – In this phase we assist organisations to achieve the full benefits of Partnership through constant optimisation

It is this process that we offer to facilitate for those organisations who wish to transform their labour relations and create a platform from which to partner in the success of an enterprise or organisation.

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