



StratAlign's Approach to Establishing Collaborative Employee Relations and Sustaining Workplace Partnerships

1 Introduction

StratAlign has developed an approach to the transformation or strengthening of workplace partnerships which has been tested in a diverse range of organisational contexts over at least the past 12 years.

The building of workplace partnerships is a process and a journey, and not an event. Our approach is not to facilitate an event but to enable an organisation to collaboratively develop an implementable roadmap towards the kind of workplace collaboration and relationships desired by all parties.

The definition of Employee Relations (ER) with which we work is: ***ER the art and science of managing collective and individual relationships within organisations in such a way that the wellbeing and productivity of people is optimised for the benefit of the company and its employees.***

2 A Different Paradigm

Historically workplace relationships in South Africa have been largely influenced by a hierarchical instructional style of management and a demand driven approach by unions. This approach is becoming anachronistic in a world of work that is transforming rapidly, is increasingly knowledge driven and reliant on technological innovation. Employees in the new world of work are and should be treated as thinkers and problem solvers actively engaged in driving enterprise performance.

This paradigm requires of managers, employees and employee representatives much greater degrees of positive engagement underpinned by healthy dialogue and a recognition that this is the best path to mutual gains. Such cooperation should be evident between Companies and their recognised unions as well as between managers and employees.

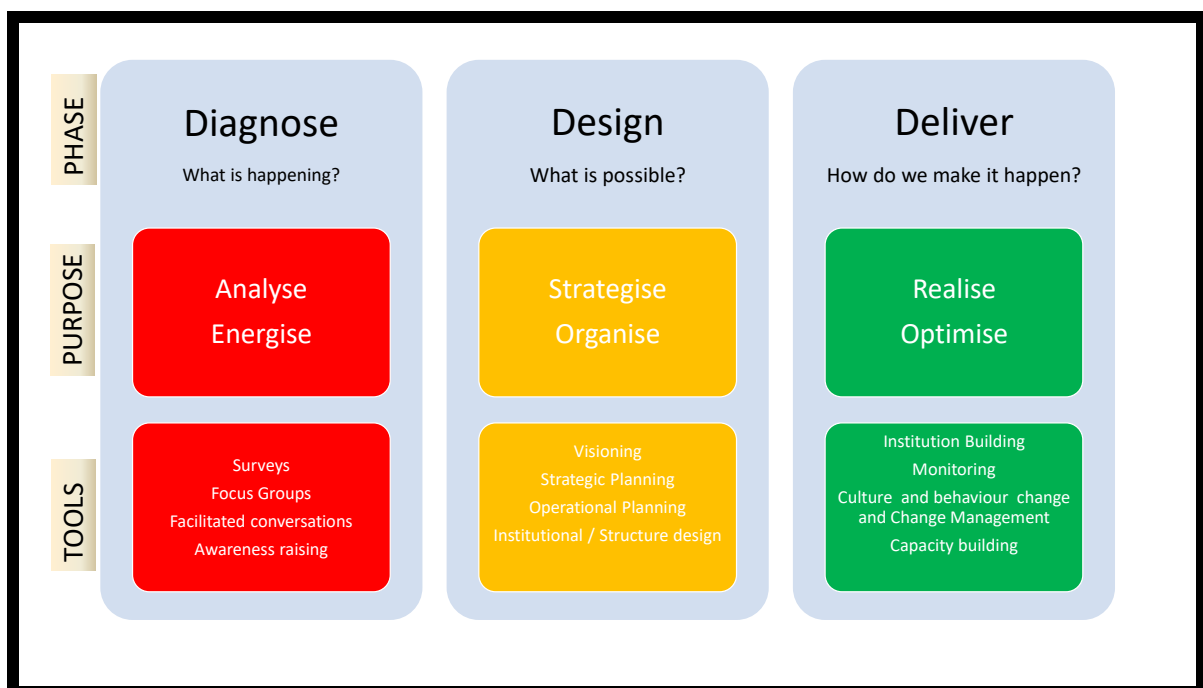
3 Critical Success Factors for Workplace Partnerships

In our experience, a successful journey towards constructive workplace partnerships requires the following key dimensions:

- Company and Union Leaders need to be committed to and aligned with the objectives of the initiative. Without the full commitment of leaders and a willingness on their part to own and drive the process, the initiative has little chance of success.
- A thorough diagnosis of the current state of workplace relations needs to be undertaken.
- The leadership of the Company and the Union should then engage with one another based on that diagnosis in a facilitated process to explore the possibilities, options and actions required to achieve improvements in workplace relations. This will result in a Strategic Plan to transform workplace relations.
- All stakeholders should be involved in the process, especially frontline leaders, who are the primary connection between an organisation and its workforce.
- Successful implementation of the plan will require a different set of competencies to be displayed by all parties. These competencies include, but are not limited to, the following.
 - Collaborative and facilitative leadership
 - Communications
 - Problem solving
 - Mutual gains negotiation
 - Emotional intelligence
 - Conflict management
 - Effective meeting management
 - Organisational culture transformation
 - Crucial conversations
 - Etc...

4 The Path to Partnership driven Workplaces: The Journey of Engagement (3D's)

The diagram below provides a graphic representation of the journey that the development of sound healthy workplace relations should follow:



These phases have been distilled from our actual experiences in numerous workplaces. Each of these phases seeks to achieve the outcomes below:

DIAGNOSIS INCLUDES:

- **ANALYSIS** – 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. It is here that interviews are conducted with key personnel from management and union, a survey of employees undertaken and focus groups facilitated to understand the current realities on the ground. This phase is crucial to understanding the beginning point of the journey of transformation in workplace relations and the conditions under which further process steps should be taken. During this phase the current HR programmes and indicatives can be analysed, assessed and a report on their alignment and effectiveness can be prepared.
- **ENERGISING** – In this phase we also seek to create the conditions under which parties are able to engage with each other in strategising towards mutually desired different outcomes. Here we expose stakeholders to new and different ways of doing things and experiences that could lead to the desired outcome.

DESIGN INCLUDES:

- **STRATEGISING** – In this phase we assist parties to co-craft an agreed strategy to achieve mutually desired outcomes for transformed workplace relations. This could include any or all of the following:
 - The development of Workplace Relations Strategy
 - A review of Employee Relations policies and practices to bring them in line with the new strategy.
 - The designing of systems of engagement to give effect to sound healthy relations.
- **ORGANISING** – Here we support the organisation in doing necessary planning and organisational development to embed the new strategy.

DELIVER INCLUDES

- **REALISING** – In this phase we support organisations to realise the benefits of the new deal through effective implementation and competency development
- **OPTIMISING** – In this phase we assist organisations to achieve the full benefits of constructive workplace relations through constant evaluation and optimisation.