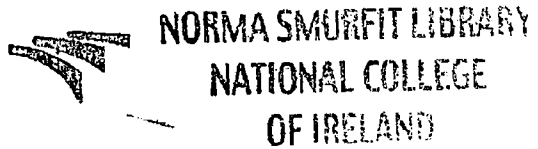


**SECOND GENERATION WORKPLACE PARTNERSHIP IN THE
PUBLIC SECTOR - A CASE STUDY**



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Declaration Page

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment of the programme of study leading to the award of Master of Arts Degree in Human Resource Management is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed;

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the concept of workplace partnership in the public sector in the Republic of Ireland. It reviews the historical antecedents to partnership in the form of a discussion and a review of literature on concepts such as employee involvement, participation and industrial democracy. The suggestion that partnership has been derived from separate traditions emanating in management and union schools of thought is discussed. The issue of mutual gains as a coherent resolution of the competing traditions is also examined.

The historical trajectory of partnership as a model of employment relations in Ireland is sketched and the emergence of second generation workplace partnership in the public sector is explained.

The research is by way of a case study of a particular organisation in the public sector and consisted of qualitative interviews with management and union participants as the central partnership committee in that organisation.

The findings of the research indicate that while there may be a level of dissatisfaction among union representatives with partnership there is a general positive attitude to same and a feeling that mutual gains are an outcome of the process. However there appears to be a level of confusion as to how partnership does or should relate to the parallel collective bargaining arena and whether partnership is driving modernisation of the public sector.

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INTRODUCTION

The focus of this dissertation is an exploration of workplace partnership in a public sector organisation –An Bord Pleanála. It is thus a case study approach but within a particular context of the overarching framework of the style and format of workplace or local partnership promoted centrally by the government in the civil service and public sector generally.

Workplace partnership is a broad topic which it is considered raises number potential areas for research and analysis. However in broadly assessing same from practical experience it appears to me that workplace partnership has still not coherently resolved the question of what it is intended to be or do in terms of overall employment relations and human resource practices. On the one hand union representatives appear to envisage that it is intended to promote the spread of democracy to decision making in the workplace as being a socially worthwhile aim in itself. This perspective leans heavily on the concept of industrial democracy and the ceding or sharing of management power to employees. It posits partnership as an intrinsic good thing rather than as an instrumental tool directed at the improvement of organisational performance while acknowledging that the latter may be an outcome of partnership. In contrast a management or employer perspective featuring a predisposition to fear ceding management power and control over decision making in the organisation would tend to emphasise a less threatening (to management control) form of partnership. This would rather concentrate on partnership as a vehicle to encourage or facilitate co-operation with the introduction of human resource practices associated with high performance work systems which would in any event include such employee consultation and participation. These would in addition congregate around practices aimed at fostering improved employee team working, flexibility and performance management with a view to releasing and exploiting employee potential for innovation, responsibility taking and commitment in favour of overall business/management objectives. In this scenario partnership is instrumental in promoting achievement of organisational objectives and is not an end in itself. Significantly in their isolated form (without a partnership vehicle) within a unitarist

framework these high performance work practices can be unilaterally imposed using unfettered management prerogative.

By contrast, within a pluralist unionised workplace, they may be resisted and hence in the public sector the partnership model appears to have been used as the vehicle to facilitate their introduction. The above broad sketch suggests that partnership can be a socially constructed reality in that it can mean different things to different people. This in effect can mean that actors in the employment arena who are involved in partnership may be operating on the basis of different and potentially conflicting understandings of the nature of the process.

The approach to the subject is also worthy of contextualisation within broader parameters than the Irish model. These parameters have an international dimension and a historical trajectory based on concepts such as industrial democracy, employee participation and involvement, joint decision making, joint problem solving and information and consultation. These concepts may relate closely to partnership and it is accordingly considered relevant that their connections with partnership are explored in order to see how their features correspond to or differ from features of partnership. This is particularly relevant to the Irish model of workplace partnership as it has been portrayed as essentially being a new invention or new model of employment relations despite the, in some cases, longstanding historical existence of the aforementioned employment practices. Accordingly the general analysis and debate relating to these concepts could parallel or be equally applied to the analysis of partnership or elements of it.

The concept of partnership in Ireland

The partnership concept as presently operated in the public sector has been derived from the logic of the social partnership arrangements which have been in place since 1987 and have their visible manifestation in the various national agreements. However the devolvement of the central partnership model to local workplace level did not formally emerge until the late 1990's in the Partnership 2000 agreement and it is thus still a relatively new phenomenon in the employment relationship. Accordingly it is considered to be still likely to be a fertile ground for research and investigation by way of dissertation. This contention is reinforced by the various examinations and explanations offered on the subject by the National Centre for

Partnership and Performance (NCP) which is the Government sponsored statutory body set up to promote the understanding and use of the concept and in particular by the fact that the Centre in 2003 following a review of the first few years of workplace partnership in the public launched a revitalisation of partnership which it termed “ Second Generation Partnership in The Public Sector” (NCP,2003a).

The set up of the NCP and the mandate given it clearly indicate that;

- (i) The government and by implication the social partners are committed to the partnership model, and
- (ii) There is recognition that there is confusion about what partnership actually means or is intended to be in operation or effect.

An Bord Pleanála

An Bord Pleanála is an independent statutory planning tribunal set up in 1977 to assess planning applications and other planning matters which had previously been within the area of responsibility of a Government ministry. Accordingly its genesis originated in a civil service type function and its organisational structure and the terms and conditions of its staff closely reflect civil service arrangements. However it is a stand alone non- commercial body and its employees are employed directly by An Bord Pleanála and are not civil servants. Its workload has seen a significant increase in recent years due to the massive expansion in building activity in the economy arising from the Celtic Tiger phase of economic expansion. It also received significant additional new work in 2001 which involved it in assessing all major local authority infrastructural projects including all major proposed road developments. In 2007 it has been given further additional significant new work arising from Government initiatives aimed at speeding up the planning system in respect of all strategic infrastructural developments within the State as it was felt that the existing planning system was too slow and cumbersome to deal with final assessments on these proposed within a speedy timeframe. Accordingly the organisation has been under sustained work pressures for a number of years and is constantly struggling to meet the demands placed upon it in a timely fashion. Its employees thus operate in a high pressure work environment.

The Board employs approximately 160 people in various roles across a range of administrative functions and in the provision of professional planning advice by its own in house planning inspectors. Unlike the civil service, the employees, irrespective of role or grade, are all members of a single union (IMPACT) and this brings a certain coherence to union-management relations. However the significant increase in workload and the introduction of new and additional work has led to major collective bargaining disagreements in recent times over terms and conditions and general resourcing of the organisation. These disagreements have required third party conciliation and arbitration and the resultant industrial relations atmosphere has been poor and indicative of a low trust relationship between the parties to collective bargaining.

The Board has effectively imported the partnership model operating in the civil service and a central partnership committee was instituted at the inception of the initial roll out of partnership in the public sector in 1999. However this committee effectively dissipated amid union accusations that it was being used to bypass the industrial relations system. Partnership was relaunched in An Bord Pleanála in 2002 with the aid of outside facilitation and the agreed understanding that either side could remove any issue from the partnership arena if it was felt that same was in essence an industrial relations matter or could only be finally determined in the collective bargaining arena.

The dissertation will attempt to contextualise the research by way of a broad literature review of the concept of partnership and a subsequent examination of the partnership model as it generally operates in the public sector in Ireland. The research aims and objectives and the research methodology will be explained and the exposition of the research findings will be followed by a brief analysis and conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review consists of two parts – the first is a wide ranging review which seeks to cover the historical trajectory of the general concept of workplace partnership. This exercise exposes a broad theoretical framework within which the meaning, forms and dimensions of partnership can be explored. This part of the review then seeks to contemporise the current forms of the concept based on examination of current strands of academic thought and research across a range of national jurisdictions but mostly relating to the incidence of the concept in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

The second part of the literature review focuses on the form and practice of partnership in the public sector in Ireland and draws heavily on literature and research from official sources such as the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCP). This second part of the literature review will also seek to determine the question of whether there is a definite prescribed form of partnership promoted in the public sector and, if so, how this relates to the history, dimensions and forms of partnership explored in the first part of the literature review.

The literature review will be used as the basis for the exposition of the research proposal which is the subject of this dissertation.

PART 1 Literature Review:

What is Partnership and where did it come from?

Most commentators on the concept of partnership agree on one thing and that is that there is great confusion about the meaning of partnership (Dundon et al., 2006; Haynes and Allen 2001; Galinos and Marchington, 2006). Obviously this issue of the definition of partnership is a fundamental question but is one to which there appears to be no single or easy answer.

Thus Dundon et al. (2006, p. 493) notes that terms such as industrial democracy, partnership, empowerment and involvement are peppered throughout the literature often with ambiguous and contradictory meanings. Haynes and Allen (2001, p.165) suggests that the modern 21st Century notion of partnership has central elements in common with a series of historical

initiatives promoting union-management co-operation and that it could therefore be considered as part of a historical tradition. Thus partnership in Ireland in its current manifestation may be considered not to be necessarily a new invention but rather a continuation or variation on a well worn theme throughout the history of industrial relations and management thought.

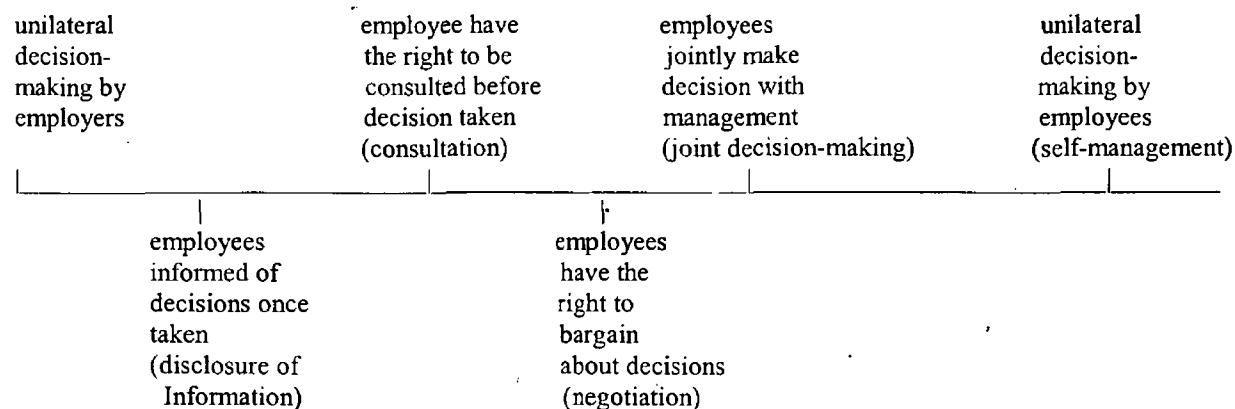
Based on this broad notion it is considered appropriate to engage in a short review of some earlier academic and business sources which analyse concepts such as industrial democracy, participation and employee involvement as these chosen sources appear to provide a very good theoretical framework for understanding the nature and dynamics of partnership itself.

The British Institute of Management (1979, p.9) in examining the concept of employee participation from a management perspective offers the following definition of that concept;-

“any agreed process established within an organisation through which employees are able to affect managerial decisions”

The central question alluded to in this definition is the exact meaning of the word “affect” and the Institute offers an analytical framework by way of a power continuum to determine the exact potency of the participation. The diagrammatic representation of this power continuum is reproduced below;

Figure 1. Types of employee involvement based on the balance of power between management and managed



Source: British Institute of Management (1979, p.11)

In the United Kingdom the traditional mode of participation has been distributive collective bargaining between trade unions and management within a pluralist and often adversarial framework (negotiation). This tradition has been largely replicated in the Irish economy. The management perspective advanced by the Institute is in favour of a reorientation away from adversarial collective bargaining towards more direct employee consultation. This preference is based on the importation of the established principles of organisational behavioural science and in particular the neo-human relations school characterised by the work of Maslow, Herzberg, Likert and McGregor. This same approach is also reflected in the management perspective on industrial democracy and participation at the workplace in Ireland outlined by MacNeill (1969). This pointer is of significance in that it introduces a major theme into the overall analysis and understanding of partnership and that is the fact that there is a solid body of management thought which promotes the idea of employee involvement / participation as good management practice and beneficial, if not essential, to achievement of organisational/business goals. Accordingly the business case for partnership is well established and the motivation to introduce same by management is present. Simply put, this business case is that the commitment and engagement of employees and the harnessing of discretionary effort by staff can be positively influenced by their involvement in decision making within the organisation. The basis of this theory in the behavioural scientists of the neo-relations school has been further developed with the emergence of strategic human resource management as the key to competitive advantage of competitive advantage (Ulrich and Brockbank, 2005). This management thought trajectory is well recognised as being a significant element in the management promotion of partnership models of employment relations. Present day conceptions of the strategic importance of human capital, employee engagement and bundles of complementary human resource practices grouped under the umbrella term of high performance work systems as a rational business basis for more partnership and involvement feature prominently in a range of literature which analyses the purpose and meaning of involvement/partnership (Danford et al., 2001; Gunnigle, 1998; Mason et al., 2003; Mellahi and Wood, 2004; Prowse and Prowse, 2007; Wallace, Gunnigle and McMahon, 2004; White, 1999). Thus Wallace, Gunnigle and McMahon (2004, p. 304) note Salamon's contention that the management utilisation of labour to its maximum effect is facilitated by employee involvement and that this mechanism is therefore generally introduced as a means of advancing management objectives.

Mellahi and Wood (2004, p.274) reflect a general criticism of this management approach to partnership by suggesting that it is “motivated by the exigencies of profitability rather than fairness”.

Contrast this assertion with Baglioni's (1996, p.2) contention that “participation as an arrangement in favour of workers” is the central point in the participatory tradition. This assertion points towards the existence of a quite separate and distinct basis for advancing partnership in the workplace and one which is firmly rooted in the worker/employee/trade union tradition. Thus the notion of democracy as a good thing in itself which should be imported from the political sphere into the workplace is one extreme end of this spectrum which in effect has its logical conclusion in self-management or worker control (Cressey and MacInnes, 1980; Baglioni, 1996).

This concept had more potency within revolutionary socialist/Marxist traditions and experimentation with forms of co-operative workplaces arising from the tide of radicalism which emerged from the 1960's in Western democracies. However it must be acknowledged as the foundation of ideological justifications for partnership from a worker perspective (Walker, 1982). This perspective in its purest form is not necessarily concerned with business objectives or firm performance but with worker's perceived rights and interests. In present day terms within the global capitalist system and public sectors in Western democracies it is clear that there is no longer a serious appetite or demand for worker control of the organisation. The tradition has rather settled on a less radical demand that worker rights and interests be acknowledged and respected to some degree in the workplace and be a definite feature of the overall employment relationship even to the extent where an employer may have to facilitate same in a way which may not add to business goals. Collective bargaining within a pluralist framework has been the traditional chosen method to manage these potentially conflicting demands. Within the worker perspective tradition it should be noted that efforts to promote the ‘humanisation’ of work as a reaction to the monotony, standardisation and de-skilling of labour instituted in the industrial age by Fordist/Taylorist modes of operation have also been a feature of this tradition (O'Leary, 1969).

In some sense these type of demands for more interesting and challenging work (work enrichment) and more employee involvement in work organisation and decision making as a means of protecting against worker 'alienation' (O'Leary, 1969) reflect the same management principles which are underpinned by the neo-human relations school of behavioural psychology.

(Walker, 1982 pp. 440-441) neatly summarises the above perspectives on worker participation in management into the following headings;

- Democracy within the workplace
- Defence and promotion of worker's interests
- Reduction of alienation and promotion of personal fulfilment
- Effective utilisation of the human resources of the workplace.

The top two perspectives would correspond to solely fulfilling the objectives/needs of workers while the latter two and particularly the last would reflect management objectives (the third perspective would likely satisfy both parties in a modern strategic human resource management context).

The essential point in the above scheme is the fact that the worker tradition has eschewed any notion of pure democracy or worker control and in so doing may have moved the two traditions closer together and thus provide a more realistic viability to partnership arrangements. Thus overall management prerogative and control need not necessarily be threatened by involvement or partnership. Furthermore it is clear that the emergence and development of strategic human resource management has built on the neo human relations school of behavioural science so that the central concepts it promotes as essential for effective organisational performance embrace the worker tradition's push for involvement and job enrichment.

Accordingly the elements of both traditions may be moving towards convergence thus making partnership a more attractive proposition for both sides.

Various commentators also characterise the elements of the two traditions and modern concerns of both the business and union agendas within the notion of pluralist versus unitarist frameworks of the workplace (Guest and Peccei, 2001; Involvement and Participation Association, 1997). However (Guest and Peccei, 2001) propose that a hybrid of both perspectives can operate to indicate the potential for some degree of convergence between both positions in the practical application of partnership in the workplace. Thus they find that partnership can operate within a pluralist unionised environment where recognition of independent employee interests is present and can be accommodated alongside co-operative partnership relationships aimed at securing organisational objectives.

Who makes the Final Decision and what can be it be about? – Levels, Scope and Forms of Partnership arrangements.

The nexus of partnership arrangements may be considered to be at the point of decision making in the organisation and the question that then arises is whether decision making power is shared between staff and management or whether management prerogative ultimately remains in place. Partnership arrangements which stress information and consultation generally do not involve ceding of management power to take the final decision (Baglioni, 1996; Cuffe, 1969). However consultation does imply a more active role and the ability to influence management decisions before they are made. Co-determination or joint decision making appears to bring the process a step further to a more equal sharing of decision making responsibility and implies that each side retains a veto to block any decision which cannot be reached by consensus.

Wallace, Gunnigle and McMahon (2004) reflect the view that “employee involvement” relates to any means of increasing the direct involvement of workers in decisions affecting their work situation. The question then remains as to where exactly partnership is intended to fit across this type of spectrum.

A common distinction that is made is between partnership at strategic or operational levels of the workplace (Baglioni, 1996; Gunnigle, 1998). This distinction seeks to differentiate direct employee involvement in task based work operations from employee involvement in more

strategic long term decisions affecting the business or organisation. The former level of involvement is clearly related to or simply equates to the progressive human resource practices deriving from behavioural science and accordingly is seen by some commentators as not constituting any real significant move towards new partnership modes of employee relations. (Roche and Geary, 2002; Oxenbridge and Brown, 2002). The central argument in this scenario is that such direct employee involvement is confined to task or operational matters only without any independent indirect strategic role for employee representation and that as such it is not robust enough to qualify as a real partnership arrangement.

(Roche and Geary, 2002) in suggesting such a weakness review the 2002 University College Dublin/Economic and Social Research Institute research into Irish management practice in the Changing Workplace which found that new human resource practices increasing employee involvement were confined primarily to a task based agenda and that management prerogative in decision making and change management was still predominant. This reflects previous research findings from an Irish Business and Employers Confederation survey in 1999 which found that task based involvement is the dominant form of employee involvement and that partnership activities can take place without institutionalised agreements and without trade union involvement (Wallace, Gunnigle and McMahon, 2004). The Irish Management Institute 1997 survey into workplace partnership is also cited by Wallace, Gunnigle and McMahon; (2004, p. 351) and their commentary on the findings of same reveals the contention that

“the key features of a partnership agreement, for example, employee involvement in strategic decision making and sharing in the rewards of success, are not present to any degree in this sample”.

The essential question again revealed here is to what extent partnership can be distinguished, if at all, from straightforward best practice human resource practices. The best practice involvement/participation initiatives centre around freeing up management control of task operations and are often features of a unitarist non-union environment and in some cases also function as union substitution or avoidance measures. However a range of commentators place partnership or a “robust form of partnership” (Haynes and Allen 2001, p.166) firmly within a pluralist unionised environment where there is direct and indirect involvement (via trade union representatives) and involvement in strategic as well as operational matters. It is argued that it is these features that truly distinguish partnership from straightforward human

resource management initiatives (D'Art and Turner, 2002; Baglioni, 1994; Guest and Peccei, 2001; Haynes and Allen, 2001; Wallace, Gunnigle and McMahon, 2004). Beyond this there appears to be little evidence of definitive views on whether partnership structures at either operational or strategic level should be operated on the basis of consultation and the ability to influence or co-determination/joint decision making. However most of the commentators who see partnership operating within a unionised pluralist environment envisage its structures/forms as operating in parallel to and not in substitution for the existing collective bargaining machinery (British Institute of Management, 1979; Dundon et al; 2006; O'Dowd, 1998).

This appears to create a new interface within traditional union-management relations which may itself warrant careful management by the respective parties. However the emergence of a parallel partnership structure to collective bargaining appears to be reconciled in these accounts by positing the view that certain matters in the workplace could benefit from consultation/discussion between management and unions/staff within a forum not dominated by traditional adversarialism and distributive bargaining positions. Thus better solutions may be more easily worked out within such an integrative atmosphere with the proviso that such solutions, or in the event of no solutions, the issues themselves, can be referred to the collective bargaining arena for ultimate confirmation. In such a scenario the status of decisions made at partnership may not be as critical to both sides as they can both still maintain the potential ultimate veto. O'Dowd (1998a) appears to be one of the only commentators who explicitly outlines this potential coherence between partnership and collective bargaining structures. Furthermore the clear suggestion O'Dowd makes (1998a, p.27) which is also reflected to a large degree in the British Institute of Management analysis (1979, p.22) is that a partnership atmosphere will encourage attitudinal restructuring strengthening bonds of respect and trust between management and staff and that this will actually feed back into the collective bargaining arena leading to it becoming more integrative. This approach appears to draw heavily on behavioural psychology and, in particular, Aronson's theory of cognitive dissonance which relies on changing actual behaviours as a necessary impetus to attitudinal change (Aronson, 2007).

Qui Bono? Who benefits from Partnership?

The question as to who benefits from partnership is often devised as a method of promoting its examination and exposing its true intent. A lot of commentators who are sceptical about partnership feel it is simply used as a management method of incorporating unions into the business agenda and thus effectively neutralising employee/union resistance to unpalatable change programmes or work intensification efforts (Bach et al., 2005; Cressey and MacInnes, 1980; Stuart and Lucio, 2000; Lucio, 2007; Oxenbridge and Brown, 2002, Suff and Williams, 2002). Oxenbridge and Brown (2002) go as far as to say that partnership may simply be the practice of human resource management itself without any other particular dimension in favour of or in recognition of worker interests. In this scenario unions and employees are considered to have more to lose and less to gain from partnership in the sense that change programmes aimed at progressing business objectives may at the same time diminish terms and conditions or otherwise negatively impact on worker interests.

However Haynes and Allen (2001, p.165) in contrast point out that the process can be risky for both sides and quote the President of the Confederation of British Industry as warning against “a possibly damaging build up of trade union influence, hidden behind the new buzzword partnership”. This reveals a potent management fear that partnership may involve the ceding of some of its power to unions or staff or allow unions to promote their own agenda through partnership.

The theoretical working through of these inherent tensions within the partnership debate has its most convincing and sustainable exposition in the theory of mutual gains (Baglioni, 1996; Kochan and Osterman, 1994; O’Dowd, 1998a). This theory posits the view that while the primacy of organisational effectiveness and achievement of business goals is recognised by both sides in partnership the co-operative working relationship must nevertheless be seen to produce positive outcomes for both sides.

This again relies heavily on recognition of and respect for the belief that the “employment relationship consists of mutual interests” (Kochan and Osterman, 1994 p. 224).

O'Dowd (1998a) places the mutual gains paradigm within the framework of distributive versus integrative bargaining as developed by Walton and McKersie to illustrate the plausible notion that working together to achieve business or organisational success will actually result in a greater share of spoils to be distributed among all participants. This model also accommodates potential for a dual mode in which integrative or co-operative processes can co-exist alongside established adversarial bargaining mechanisms (Dundon et al, 2006). Thus the co-operative partnership relationship can be used to grow the business while the hard bargaining can be confined to sharing the spoils. This can translate into negotiations relating to profit sharing or employee share ownership schemes and other forms of employee financial involvement. Mutual gains in the non-commercial sector such as the public sector may however be less tangible and thus less transparent to employees. Kochan and Osterman (1994) rely on forms of gain such as job security guarantees and commitment to employee training and development programmes as potential tangible non financial gains. Otherwise the gains can be more intrinsic but based on the same psychological satisfiers identified as equally if not more important by behavioural scientists such as Maslow, McGregor, McClelland and Herzberg – thus intrinsic satisfaction at sharing in organisational success, being able to reach one's potential through challenging and responsible work, working within a team dynamic and having one's opinion being sought and respected can often be sufficient to satisfy employees that they are in fact gaining from the employment relationship and partnership arrangements.

The question of whether the trade union movement should beware of the suggested incorporationist tendency of partnership to effect its demobilisation or neutralisation as an active agent in defence of worker interests may however be a moot point at this stage in Ireland and the United Kingdom. Danford et al. (2005) reflect on the fact that the British Trade Union Congress has itself endorsed the workplace partnership model subject to its compatibility with its own six principles of partnership being shared among management and unions/employees in the workplace.

These principles are as follows;

- Commitment to success of the workplace.
- Recognising legitimate interests.
- Commitment to employment security.
- Focus on quality of working life.
- Transparency
- Adding value

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (1993; 1995; 1997) and its individual unions (IMPACT, 1998) have long since embraced a similar general approach. Thus it is clear that the centre of the main trade union movements in these islands have no qualms about reorienting themselves into business unions or even business partners within a broad integrative/co-operative relationship at workplace level albeit within a mutual gains model.

Guest and Peccei (2001) in commenting generally positively on the business union approach and its ability to generate mutual gains within a pluralist framework do however reflect that it is a “constrained mutuality” in that the primacy and strength of the business agenda would tend to promote the balance of advantage and gain heavily in the favour of management and organisational interests.

A Brief Word on Expectations of Partnership.

As outlined at the commencement of this part of the literature review there may be different understandings of the nature of partnership. Arising from this a selected range of the literature reviewed places great emphasis on the creation/management of expectations.. The British Institute of Management (1979, p.49) advises its members that “an organisation must know clearly why it is developing participative practices in order to avoid creation of unwarranted expectations”.

Walker (1982, p. 435) notes that the expectations of the actors in participative initiatives are neither always clearly stated nor is the divergence between them sufficiently recognised. Furthermore he also points out (Walker, 1982, p. 438) that employee participation in practice may run counter to the intentions/interests of management or vice versa. This is also reflected by Mason, Heaton and Morgan (2004) who posit that embarking on partnership initiatives should be viewed as a learning process and that the “deliberate” and “emergent” strategy of spectrum of Mintzberg and Waters is a useful framework to conceptualise the probability that the partnership journey once commenced is liable to wander away from any pre-determined destination.

Haynes and Allen (2001, p. 174) go as far as to suggest that the expectations of the parties are critical and that their continued buy in to the process is contingent on their expectations being met. In this context they also recognise that the partnership style relationship remains vulnerable to poorly specified or matched expectations among the participants.

This is an acknowledgement that to a large extent partnership can be a nebulous concept which exists rather as a socio-psychological/emotional construct among the individual/group participants in same as distinct from a concept that has a well defined objective reality. Thus the management of partnership may be likely to be fraught with misunderstandings and confusion across the range of individual participants.

Summary of Main Themes emerging

- Partnership may have distinct historical trajectories one management driven the other employee/worker driven.
- The above traditions may be considered to have moved towards convergence thus facilitating agreed partnership initiatives.
- Threats and opportunities may still exist for both sides within the partnership model.
- A mutual gains model of partnership may be an attempt to solidify this convergence within a pluralist framework
- The expectations of the participants in partnership may be critically important in its sustainability.

LITERATURE REVIEW – PART 2

Part one of the literature review attempted to examine the broad theoretical concept of partnership. However given that the unit of analysis in this dissertation is confined to a case study of a public sector organisation in Ireland it is considered necessary and appropriate that literature pertaining to the particular form of partnership in the public sector and particularly in the civil service must be also examined in order to further focus the context of the research. This review draws mainly from official Government documentation and various research and analytical studies carried out by the National Centre for Partnership and Performance . The review will seek to chart the origin, development and implementation of the official prescribed version of partnership such as same may be argued to exist. It will also point out linkages or common threads with the broad overview of partnership from Part one of the literature review.

The origins of Public Sector Partnership

The general thrust of management initiatives towards root and branch reform of the culture and performance of the public sector arose from general environmental trends in the wider economy globally and nationally. These trends promote accountability, customer service, and value for money and the need for complementary required staff behaviours and competencies of flexibility, commitment, expertise and customer focus. This reform agenda found its expression in the “modernisation” programme which underpinned the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI) in the Civil Service in the mid 1990’s. Reflecting moves in the private sector towards reorienting commercial organisations towards a leaner more focussed approach to performance, the SMI also adopted the emergence of strategic human resource management as the key driver of organisational performance. Thus the main document arising from the SMI (*Delivering Better Government*, 1996, p.2) announces that key requirements for achievement of modernisation included “a new approach to human resource management and a new and fully integrated performance management system.”

The impetus for a more participatory approach to management-staff relations also finds its origins in this document as it highlights processes for communication and consultation as the key for delivering meaningful change within the sector (Delivering Better Government, 1996, p.78).

However within the same general timeframe the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (I.C.T.U.) had been developing a coherent approach to workplace change which reflected a more receptive and participative approach to same (I.C.T.U., 1993; 1995). This posited union/staff engagement with and acceptance of change subject to proper consultation on same as an appropriate and viable union strategy distinct from adversarial collective bargaining over the nuts and bolts of the change agenda. This approach culminated in the fact that it was I.C.T.U. which in 1997 sponsored the demand that partnership should be devolved to the workplace level (Wallace ,Gunnigle and McMahon, 2004 p.340). Accordingly it should be recognised that the impetus for workplace partnership in Ireland and in the Irish public sector appears to mirror international experience in that it can be said to have been contemporaneously driven from separate management and trade union sources.

National Agreements/Workplace Partnership

The prescribed official trajectory of workplace partnership in the public sector has been embedded primarily in the various national social partnership programmes arising since the mid 1990's and it is informative to indicate the significant elements of partnership envisaged in same since then and culminating in the most recent programme Towards 2016. For ease of reference this is attempted by way of the chart overleaf;

Programme and Years covered	Main elements stressed and significant elements introduced in same concerning partnership and public sector modernisation
Programme for Competitiveness and Work 1994-1997	Introduces and promotes the idea of increased employee involvement stressing greater communication and consultation with employees (direct and indirect) as key to effective development of the workplace.
Partnership 2000 1997-2000	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Defines partnership as “an active relationship based on recognition of a common interest to secure the competitiveness, viability and prosperity of the workplace”. 2. Employees accepted as stakeholders with rights and interest to be considered in the context of major decisions. 3. Demand for modernisation of public sector formalised – change now necessary and must be accepted by all parties – adversarial approach to change must be replaced by an open, co-operative process based on effective consultation and participation by all. 4. Public Sector enabled claim additional payments (local bargaining) subject to verification of progress on modernisation through Action Plans.
Programme for Prosperity and Fairness 2000 – 2003	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Greater urgency in progressing modernisation of public sector required. 2. Implementation of the modernisation programme explicitly stated to be advanced under the partnership arrangements already in place. 3. Support for partnership to be provided - National Centre for Partnership (NCP) becomes National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCP) and given enhanced role.
Sustaining Progress 2003 – 2005	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Parties recommit to extending and deepening workplace partnership. 2. Parties recommit to facilitating change/modernisation. 3. Partnership approach recognised as a useful mechanism to help secure change and modernisation in public sector by involving staff in the change and modernisation process. 4. Benchmarking increases and all of the basic pay linked to external verification of progress on modernisation using Action Plan and absence of any industrial action.
Towards 2016 2006 – 2015 Framework (Pay elements 2006 – 2008)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continued need for advocacy of partnership at workplace level. 2. Need for modernisation/organisational change re-emphasised with principle of partnership that appropriate consultation with staff will take place. 3. Explicit statement (p.116) that following discussions with staff management have the right to implement change. 4. All pay increases linked to verification of progress on modernisation using Action Plan and absence of any industrial action.

An analysis of the content of these programmes clearly indicates that partnership was never promoted in same as a forum for joint co-determination of decision-making or as a replacement or as a substitution for collective bargaining – this is revealed by the preponderance of terms such as information, consultation, discussion involvement and participation which suggest a right of prior consultation and ability to influence as the limits of the intended model of partnership in the public sector. Thus ultimate management decision making prerogative appears to remain intact and this is confirmed by the explicit statement in towards 2016 (p.116) that management have the right to proceed to implement change following discussion (and not agreement) with staff. It is interesting to note that no such explicit declaration featured at the outset of the launch of partnership and its inclusion hints at a level of frustration with progress on modernisation/change. This is equally reflected in the progressive direct linkage between reward in the form of pay and verified progress on modernisation which is suggesting that the use of partnership as a vehicle for change/modernisation may not have been sufficient in itself to effect the necessary changes in attitudes/behaviours and performance considered to qualify as significant real progress on the change/modernisation agenda.

The initial launch of the formal public sector partnership committee structures in 1998 was also templated by the agreed General Council Report number 1331 which is a joint union-management document and it builds on the definition and form of partnership outlined in Partnership 2000. This document confirms, inter alia, that ;

- (a) The Partnership agenda can include staff input to both strategic and operational matters,
- (b) Partnership is to exist in parallel to and not in replacement for the main collective bargaining machinery;
- (c) The primacy of the need for partnership to drive change and modernisation (the business agenda) ;
- (d) Partnership can also be used to raise issues relating to training and development, work/life balance and the work environment (mutual gains potential) .
- (e) Sustainability of partnership depends on trust between the participants.

Beyond this agreed union-management Report it is interesting to note the contents of contemporaneous IMPACT trade union bulletin on partnership which issued to its Branches in the Civil and related Public Sector (Partnership 2000 modernising the Civil Service IMPACT Information Bulletin No. 3 – Appendix A). In commenting on Partnership 2000 and interpreting its meaning for members it made it clear, inter alia, that;

- Partnership involves acceptance by staff and unions of the need for continuous organisational change and improvement in services (note acceptance of primacy of business agenda).
- While partnership will not replace collective bargaining it is expected that partnership principles will progressively reduce the traditional adversarial approach to dealing with industrial relations issues (reflecting principle of attitudinal restructuring).
- Partnership allows workers and their representatives to **influence** the strategy and operations of the employment (note acknowledgement of strategic and operational levels and direct and indirect involvement but also limits of partnership in terms of management prerogative).
- Is a relationship based on trust.

Essentially the documents reveal a remarkable consistency of approach between the central employer and trade union bodies on the meaning and purpose of partnership in the public sector and appears to confirm that the central trade union movement did not sugar coat partnership as worker control or the end of management prerogative.

O'Dowd (1998b p.16) reflecting on the introduction of partnership in his then capacity as joint director of the National Centre for Partnership suggests that "partnership would become the common sense way of approaching organisational change".

The suggestion arising from analysis of the National Programmes that the introduction of partnership as a driver of change in the public sector did not proceed as smoothly as planned is also reflected in two Government sponsored reviews of workplace partnership in the general economy (O'Donnell and Teague, 2000) and specifically in the civil service (O'Dwyer et al., 2002). O'Donnell and Teague (2000) while maintaining a general positive

tone on progress suggests that differences remain on how partnership should be ideally defined and that partnership needed to be deepened by creating shared task or project based activity among participants on the ground so that tangible outcomes could arise and attitudinal restructuring based on working together could be facilitated. The overall thrust of their analysis appears to indicate some frustration at the lack of real diffusion of partnership practices to workplace level despite the actual partnership structures in the form of partnership committees being in place – more appearance than substance. O’Dwyer et al. in their review (2002,p.17) reflect that while there may be a common understanding of the intended role of partnership of the top level between the Government and ICTU this understanding does not appear to have percolated down to the level of the workplace. Furthermore this research found (O’Dwyer et. al., 2002, p.21) that

“there is a pervasive sense of difference between and among management and unions as to what partnership actually means. In particular there is confusion regarding the relationship between partnership and industrial relations and between partnership and management decision-making”.

Thus confusion about whether partnership was a consultative or decision making forum was evident from the research and this appeared to be hampering progress on partnership. This report also found evidence of suspicions that partnership was being used by-pass collective bargaining mechanisms or conversely that unions were blocking discussion of items suitable for partnership on the basis that they were industrial relations issues which should be dealt with solely in the collective bargaining arena. The O’Dwyer review suggested that even at that early stage of the process partnership may have been running out of energy and it concluded with a series of recommendations for its revitalisation. These included a recommendation that the participants should independently clarify their individual expectations of partnership and that there was a need to seek to reach a shared understanding of the role of partnership at workplace level.

National Centre for Partnership and Performance Documentation/Research

The National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCP) which emanated from its previous and original incarnation as the National Centre for Partnership has attempted to bridge any gaps in understanding of the official Government sponsored and central union agreed version of partnership. It has produced various explanatory reports and analysis of research exploring the meaning and purpose of partnership and its appropriateness as a vehicle in driving organisational change and superior performance outcomes (NCP 2003a ; 2005a; 2006; 2007a; 2007b). Reflecting the addition of the word performance to its name is a clear theme running through its literature that the business agenda and superior organisational performance by way of the use of high performance work systems/strategic human resource management practices is the central component of and justification for the partnership project in Ireland. The high involvement/high participation emphasis is diffused throughout the literature as the *effective interface between strategic human resource management and employment relations*. However it also clearly adopts the necessity of mutual gains as being a necessary feature of the process (NCP 2003a; p.12; NCP 2007a, p.7) and thus places partnership within a pluralist framework. Its documentation also reflects O'Dowd's (1998b) earlier view that partnership can be instrumental in building the capacity for change through "active employee engagement and commitment" (NCP, 2007, p.10).

In reviewing the NCP literature it is clear that it positions partnership as an enabler of change by building a capability for agility, flexibility and innovation through acceptance of change by all as a normal feature of workplace organisation and employment relations as distinct from a matter the details of which must be processed through more time consuming traditional adversarial collective bargaining process.

Following on from the O'Dwyer review of Partnership in the Civil Service the NCP conducted its own review and analysis of the operation and experience of the particular partnership model in the civil service (NCP 2003a; 2003b).

The NCPP conducted research in four Government Departments and engaged in consultation and analysis to address the deficiencies referred to in the O'Dwyer review. It then identified blockers and enablers of good partnership practice with a view to embarking on the revitalisation of the civil service partnership model into what it termed "Second Generation Partnership". Its findings are summarised below;

Enablers of Good Partnership Practices in the Civil/Public Sector

Participative Management Style diffused throughout organisation.
Operational and strategic issues on agenda and broaden agenda to include major issues.
Develop clarity on role of partnership and shared view of boundaries.
Develop clarity on relationship of partnership to Industrial relations machinery and seek to have some mutually supportive.
Mainstream partnership as a central process driving change/modernisation.
Real consultation and active listening by management – employee input must be visible.
Ensure mutual gains

Blockers of Good Partnership Practices in the Civil/Public Sector

Hierarchical management culture/style – managers not engaged
Limited shared understanding of key partnership concepts and uncertainty about relationship with industrial relations and management decision-making systems.
Consultation perfunctory not robust
Agenda perceived as management driven and too narrow
Partnership seen as peripheral
Low trust

The NCPP research and analysis exposes the fact that considerable confusion about the meaning and purpose of partnership appeared to be blocking its general emergence as a way of doing business in the civil service. The reluctance of the early launch of partnership to be prescriptive on the relationship between partnership and industrial relations and management decision making may thus have hampered rather than facilitated the development of partnership. The drive towards the Second Generation of Partnership promoted by the NCPP seeks to iron out these blockers and promote the enablers and also seeks to further mainstream partnership by explicitly linking it to the modernisation Action Plan verification process which now lies at the heart of driving public sector reform. Thus central partnership committees in the civil and public sector (including An Bord Pleanalá) must agree on Action Plans for modernisation which contain specific objectives and time lines for achievement of those objectives. These plans must be approved by an external verification group or officer.

Furthermore the central partnership committees are also responsible for monitoring and reporting on the progress in achieving the agreed modernisation performance indicators set out in the Action Plan prior to submission to the verification group or officer (in the case of An Bord Pleanála this is the Secretary General of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government). A significant element in this process is that the payment of all pay increases due to employees under the central pay deal are only cleared for payment when the verification process has established and confirmed that satisfactory progress has in fact been made in accordance with the Action Plan objectives.

Thus it is clear that the approach to encourage modernisation through partnership has been significantly altered to introduce an element of sanction or punishment for perceived failure to deliver. While this is promoted by NCPP as a significant boost to partnership it could also be interpreted as indicating the failure of the attempt to foster and embed organic workplace partnership as the driver of change. However it does indicate a coherent strategic human resource strategy in terms of utilising reward systems to encourage desired behaviours and performance outcomes. It should also be noted that the original templates for Action Plans were centrally imposed on organisations like An Bord Pleanála so that central agreed benchmark practices for modernisation such as Performance Management and Development Systems had to be included in every Action Plan (see Action Plan template enclosed as appendix B).

A question arises as to how or whether such external interference and imposition of procedures disturbs or facilitates emergence of real partnership relations at the level of the workplace.

The main themes arising from this part of the literature review are as follows;

- Workplace partnership in the Irish Public Sector has been driven by employer **and** union agendas.
- There was common agreement on the purpose and scope of workplace partnership in the public sector at the head of the relevant employer-union organisations.

- Research indicates that no such common agreement was prevalent at workplace level and that confusion was hampering development of substantive partnership practices/outcomes.
- The National Centre for Partnership and Performance has identified certain blockers and enablers of partnership in the public sector and has sought to promote a Second Generation of Partnership in the sector based on recognition of the need to decrease the blockers and increase the enablers.
- The Action Plan/Performance verification process now in place in the public sector has introduced a significant new dimension to the partnership process in the public sector.

This concludes the literature review section of the dissertation.

RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

A clear point arising from the literature is the contention that partnership is a complex and potentially varied entity which is as much a socio-psychological emotional relationship as a hard edged defined objective reality. Furthermore in this overall context the generic literature on partnership explored in Part 1 of the review suggests that certain areas or dimensions of partnership have often been ignored or relatively neglected in research on the area. These areas appear to correspond to the relative dearth of published research that considers the views and experiences of workers in partnership environments (Danford et al.,2005) and to exploration of the expectations of participants in partnership as a basis for exploring the outcomes of partnership on a dimension of satisfaction/dissatisfaction among the same participants (Walker, 1982; Haynes and Allen, 2001).

Most of the literature examining partnership within a pluralist framework (Kochan and Osterman, 1994; O'Dowd, 1998a, NCPP, 2003a) emphasises the critical importance of mutual gains. While there appears to be extensive research on gains models relating to financial participation in commercial workplaces there is little exploration of how mutual gains can be quantified or explored in non-commercial areas like the public sector.

Part 2 of the literature review emphasised the central importance to the employer side of the public sector modernisation process within the context of partnership and the research heretofore conducted in the civil service appeared to have found a lack of clear evidence of progress on same due to a range of potential blockers operating in the system. Furthermore the O'Dwyer Review and the National Centre for Partnership and Performance research in the Civil Service predated the NCPP launch of the Second Generation of Partnership in the Civil Service and it may therefore be opportune to now conduct research post that launch to explore whether it has substantially affected aspects of the partnership process or the experience of same in a public sector organisation. In particular it may be an opportune time to see whether certain blockers are still hampering the roll out of partnership.

Having considered the above themes and the apparent gaps in the reviewed research it is considered appropriate to choose an overall research aim which would focus on exploring second generation workplace partnership in a public sector environment in 2007. The objectives of the research would seek to use some of the above major themes as the basis of the building blocks of the research and the crystallisation of a research hypothesis. Following this logic the main objectives of the research would be to ;

- Seek to establish the expectations of management and staff participants in partnership including their view on the purpose of partnership.
- Seek to establish whether there is consensus or divergence on the purpose of partnership between management and staff representatives and also within those groups.
- Seek to establish whether the participants in partnership perceive there to be mutual gains from the partnership process.
- Seek to establish whether the participants in partnership feel that its role in modernisation of the public sector, particularly in the context of the Action Plan verification process, is supportive or detrimental to partnership and is effective or not.
- Seek to establish whether participants in partnership are generally satisfied/dissatisfied with partnership in terms of their original expectations of the process.

These selected themes/objectives would attempt to give a good overall yet focussed basis to the broad research aim but would not necessarily claim to be exhaustive in terms of covering the full dimensions of workplace partnership. However the research methodology would seek to enable any other significant dimensions to emerge in the research.

The foregoing general aim and objectives reflect working hypotheses which seek to broadly encapsulate the thrust of the major themes within their scope. These are as follows;

“Partnership in the public sector may be operating solely as a device to facilitate the introduction and implementation of more flexible working arrangements rather than an attempt to provide for meaningful staff participation in the organisation. The operation of Partnership may not be meeting the expectations of the participants.”

The hypotheses are guided by the advice of Fisher (2007, p.37) to couch any hypotheses in plain English which can be easily understood and to avoid jargon or other esoteric terminology. Accordingly, I have consciously avoided the use of terms such as “high performance work systems”, “strategic human resource management initiatives” or even “modernisation” and reduced same to the more understandable concept of “flexible working arrangements”.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Achievability

A factor in the choice of research methodology which was of concern was the question of achievability. While this does not relate to the appropriateness of a chosen research method vis a vis the overall research aims and objectives and does not appear to be covered to any great degree in academic literature on research methods. I believe it is a significant constraint on part-time students undertaking a dissertation as one element of a taught master's degree programme. It must therefore be an over arching element in consideration of the choice of research methodology in that context. Accordingly in approaching the research I was conscious of the need not to over-reach my capabilities in terms of time constraints and to look for a research design which would tend towards simplicity rather than complexity but would nevertheless enable a meaningful research exercise emerge from the process.

Qualitative –v- Quantitative Research Method

The consideration of an appropriate research method was driven primarily by the nature of the topic the subject of the research. The literature review and the subsequent emergence of the overall research aims and objectives revealed the complexity of the research topic. It also pointed to the suggestion that partnership tends more towards being a socio-psychological construct rather than necessarily having a hard-edged objective reality. Thus at its core it reveals its essence through the emotions and attitudes of the participants and their perception of relationships between them rather than this essence being revealed by an examination of the prescribed physical processes of partnership structures.

In analysing the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research methods Bryman and Bell (2003) postulate that qualitative research methodologies place emphasis on the way in which individual's interpret their social world while quantitative research methods tend towards viewing social reality as an external objective reality which can thus be measured. This broad insight into research methodologies would tend to strongly suggest that the issue of workplace partnership is best approached using a qualitative research method.

Fisher (2007; p. 59) asserts that quantitative surveys are not efficient means of studying the complexity of things in particular. Furthermore qualitative research methods on a general level are frequently associated with inductive/interpretivist reasoning which places emphasis on driving theory relating to and understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants. In layperson's terms this position can be more easily understood by conceptualizing same as indicating that theories about a subject such as workplace partnership may often be based on the analysis of detailed and rich accounts of how the subject is experienced and perceived by the people actively engaged in the process. Of course this is not to say that quantitative research methodologies relating to such a topic cannot be valid or achievable and same may be appropriate having regard to issues such as population size and the particular aims and objectives of a research project. However in this case the thrust of the research aim is based on a more qualitative aspect or focus as it seeks to explore expectations and attitudes toward partnership. Accordingly it was considered appropriate to choose qualitative research as the most suitable research method.

Case Study –v- Comparative Study

This issue of the overall scope of the research was the next matter to be considered. It was obviously convenient to tend towards a case study for practical logistical reasons relating to ease of access and containability within a single workplace. I was also confident that achievability would be facilitated by a restriction to a single unit of analysis (An Bord Pleanála). Obviously the single organization case study approach would raise questions relating to the value of the research in terms of the applicability of same outside of the context of An Bord Pleanála and I considered that this might be a major flow in the approach.

For this reason I also considered adopting a comparative approach using one or more other public sector organisations despite its potential to significantly increase the scope of the work involved and create logistical problems relating to the matters such as access. However I was also then struck in the course of my literature review by a seemingly rich research tradition of single organisation case studies as being a widely accepted research approach in the academic world.

Thus for example Suff and Williams (2004, p.35) in commenting on their own case study of employee perceptions in a single company asserted that

“clearly the extent to which general inferences can be drawn from case study research is limited. Nevertheless, it is important not to overlook the significance of the insights that can be drawn from critical cases”.

Fisher (2007, p. 59) in distinguishing between the breadth and depth of research also suggests that a case study approach would be entirely appropriate where an in-depth understanding of a particular situation was the thrust of the research aim.

Furthermore in my opinion the fact that it was already determined that the research would be based on qualitative rather than quantitative research methods limited the achievable scope for comparative analysis. Thus while a quantitative methodology such as a survey questionnaire would be far more easily administered in more than one organisation the conduct of qualitative research would be considerably more time consuming and logistically difficult to implement and manage. It was therefore considered beyond the realistic scope of the research to undertake comparative qualitative studies and to confine the scope to a case study approach in An Bord Pleanála.

Unit of Analysis within An Bord Pleanála

The next issue arising was the selection of the unit of analysis within An Bord Pleanála. In the context of Partnership there was an obvious ready made unit in the form of the members of the central partnership committee of the organization. This group had a relatively stable membership since the launch of the Second Generation Partnership in 2003 and hence its members were sufficiently experienced and familiar with the form, context, problems and successes of partnership in the recent past.

They were thus considered ideally placed to generate qualitative material in the form of views and attitudes on partnership. The alternative of this approach was to enlarge the unit of analysis outwards to the general staff body. In this regard I was aware that other staff had previously been involved in partnership activities in various task based sub-committees but that these had not been a feature of the process over the last three years and direct involvement in partnership has in effect in recent times been confined to the central

committee. Having regard to the partnership committees recently expressed concern that its activities had a worryingly low profile among the general staff body I felt that it was not likely that any useful material specifically relating to the stated research aims and objectives would be likely to emerge from broadening the unit of analysis further than the members of the central partnership committee.

Choice of Qualitative Methodology – Qualitative Interview and/or Focus Group

Bryman and Bell (2003) in exploring qualitative research methods indicate the range of options as including participant observation, qualitative interviews, focus groups and qualitative content analysis. Having regard to the nature of the research topic participant observant was discounted as impractical as a basis for the research methodology as the central partnership committee meet only once a month and it would be difficult within the time constraints involved to develop any real coherence or substance to such an approach. My initial focus for my primary research tool settled on the qualitative interview and focus group methods as the most likely appropriate research methods.

My main concerns in respect of use of focus groups related to the potential effect of group dynamics suppressing the emergence of the full range of attitudes and opinions held by each individual member of the partnership committee. This could arise even where the focus group would be split into separate management only and union/staff only groups as hierarchical relationships within the workplace or the strength of dominant personalities could still potentially operate negatively in either such group. This important limitation of focus group usage is highlighted by Bryman and Bell assertion (2003, p.380) in discussing Asch's 1951 study on group conformity that

“an emerging group view may mean that a perfectly legitimate perspective held by just one individual may be suppressed”.

While it is obviously open to seek to manage such groups to overcome such problems I considered that the use of focus groups was probably not advisable for the following further reasons;

- It might be uncomfortable for the participants due to hierarchical relationship or polar opposite views existing particularly in the context of the prevailing industrial relation climate in the organisation.
- It might work to mask divergent views among the individual groups.
- It would be unlikely to yield any additional information beyond what could be revealed by the full range of views expressed by the same individuals in separately conducted qualitative interviews.
- It might limit the scope for discussion on the full range of areas indicated as constituting the research aims/objectives on the basis that it is considered that only three areas or questions should be put to such a group.
- It might be difficult to ensure that all participants were available at the same time to take part in the group.

Accordingly I decided that the most appropriate research method was the use of individual qualitative interviews with each member of the partnership committee as this appeared to provide a relatively comfortable method where people could relax and be assured of total confidentiality and the value of their own personal contribution to the research project. Qualitative interviews would facilitate the emergence of rich and detailed responses and allow room for full exploration of the individual views and attitudes of the participants.

Selection of Type of Qualitative Interview

Fisher (2008, p. 129) suggests three types of qualitative interview ranging from a non-structured open interview to a pre-coded structured interview with a variation in between of a semi-structured interview. The latter interview type was considered the most appropriate approach as it facilitates a fairly open discussion while at the same time operating under a flexible interview guide which nevertheless ensures that the main research objectives are covered in the interview. The completely open interview where there is an open ended general conversation about the research topic was therefore discounted. It was felt that the semi-structured interview format would effectively provide the best of both worlds in that it would be structured to explicitly cover the research objectives but would be framed within a clear understanding that the participants were free to go off the tangent of the general line of questioning and were expected to raise any matters which they considered significant to the exploration of the topic which had not been covered in the line of questioning. The pre-coded or rigidly structured interview was discounted as more appropriate to a quantitative survey methodology and as too rigid to elicit the necessary richness of response from the interview process.

Consideration and Rejection of Content Analysis

Following my review of the official Government literature relating to partnership in Ireland and the prescribed form and processes relating to same I had considered that it would be appropriate to do a content analysis of this documentation with a view to establishing the existence, strength and consistency of certain themes in that documentation. These related to the consistent emphasis in same on terminology such as employee involvement, participation and consultation and the absence of any terminology or very little of same relating to industrial democracy, joint decision making or co-determination thus clearly indicating the official intended scope of partnership vis a vis management prerogative. I considered that it would be useful to use either quantitative or qualitative content analysis of these documents as a form of triangulation to the main research methodology of qualitative interviews and as a means of introducing a broader and more sophisticated overall research methodology.

However having consulted Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 193-209) it became apparent that methods of quantitative content analysis appropriate to this particular project would likely involve counting the frequency with which certain words or phrases occur in the documentation would be a very time consuming and largely unmanageable undertaking without the use of computer-aided content analysis techniques. Furthermore the thrust of qualitative content analysis (Bryman and Bell p.p. 417 – 418) in searching – out of underlying themes or messages in the materials being analysed was considered to be closely related to the actual literature review process itself and for this reason it was felt more appropriate to leave the exposition of my conclusions with regard to the consistent themes running through these documents to Part II of the literature review.

Negotiation of Access

My approach to this was to raise the issue formally at a monthly meeting of the Central Partnership Committee (March, 2007 Meeting) and to seek agreement of the Committee (and hence the organisation itself) to the overall process and the co-operation of the individual members of the Committee to the interview process element of the research. I indicated at this stage that my research was generally based on looking a models of partnership in the public sector and having regard to my knowledge of the extreme work pressures in the organisation I suggested that the interviews were likely to take no longer than half an hour to forty five minutes. The Committee indicated its consent to the request and this was formally recorded in the minutes.

The interviews were subsequently arranged by telephone or personal face to face contact and totally at the convenience of the interviewees and in a place suitable to them (usually a confined available in-house office or meeting room). All available nine members of the committee were interviewed (4 management and 5 union/staff representatives).

The Initial interview guide contained a list of questions in the following order;

1. When did your interest in partnership begin? (introducing question)
2. What was your knowledge of the process when you became involved and how did you get that knowledge?
3. What were your expectations of partnership at the outset?
4. What do you think partnership is intended to achieve as presently operated?
5. Do you think partnership delivers benefits to the organisation?
6. Do you think benefits are mutually shared between management and staff?
7. What are the benefits for each side in your opinion? (follow up question)
8. In the context of public sector modernisation what role do you think partnership plays?
9. What role do you think it should play in this context (follow up question).
10. What in your experience has been the most significant item on the partnership over the past 3 years?
11. Do you think the partnership agenda should be broadened?
12. Are you satisfied with the operation of partnership – has it met your expectations?
Indicate a position on a scale of 1 – 5 with 1 being very satisfied and 5 being very dissatisfied.
13. What changes would you like to see in the operation of partnership and what outcomes would you like to see? (doorknob question).
14. Are there any other points you wish to make that you think are significant in relation to the partnership process.

The questions were structured in order to seek to unearth views and opinions on the major themes identified in the literature review and to relate directly to the overall research aims and objectives. Thus the following questions related to the following themes;

- | | |
|-------|---|
| 2 – 4 | Expectations / perception of what partnership means to interviewee and purpose of same. |
| 5 – 7 | Question of benefits/mutual benefits from partnership. |

8 – 10 Generally related to the area of role of partnership in public sector modernisation process.

11 – 13 Question of whether partnership as experienced has fulfilled expectations.

As advised, the interview schedule was dependant on the availability of the personnel on the partnership committee which was difficult to condense into a concentrated time frame due to unavailability on-site and on-going work pressures both for the researcher and the interviewees. Accordingly the interviews commenced on the 1st May 2007 but did not conclude until the 7th June 2007 – the last interview was a very senior member of the management team who was unable to make himself available until then due to severe on-going work pressures. The interview schedule is attached as appendix “C”.

I decided that the interview guide should be piloted on the first two interviewees on the 1st May 2007 and that it was appropriate and sufficient that these be the only pilots given the overall number of interviewees and given the fact that these interviewees represented a particular side of the committee i.e. management/union.

Prior to the commencement of the formal interview I sought to put the interviewees at their ease by indicating the following matters to them about the process.

- That the interviews were entirely confidential and that their identity would not be disclosed at any stage in the process.
- That the final thesis document would not be publicly available or made available in-house.
- That the interview was not seeking right or wrong answers to questions or confirmation of pre-determined theories but was rather interested in exploring the views of those being interviewed.
- That the semi-structured nature of the interviews was a deliberate design which while allowing to cover certain areas also allowed/encouraged interviews to go off the tangent of any particular line of questioning if they felt that this was appropriate/relevant to any issue being raised.

- That I would enable the interviewee at the end of the interview to add any views which they felt relevant to the overall topic but which had not been covered in the interview.
- That the interview was not being recorded but that I would be taking some notes of the interview (not a verbatim account) and so would be writing as they were talking – I requested that they would not be distracted by this and remain assured that I would be listening while I was writing.
- Finally I suggested to the interviewees that the interview was likely to last approximately 45 minutes.

The question of recording of the interviews was discounted for fear of it inhibiting a frank expression of views of the participants or rejection of participation. Instead I adopted the technique advised by Fisher (2007, p. 168) of the interview guide questions being pasted as headings under which of each was sufficient blank space to then insert notes of the interviewees contributions under those headings. This enabled the interview guides double as a written record of the interview and facilitate exposition of the research findings (a sample page indicating this format is enclosed at appendix “D”). Finally I used a clip board device to enable writing of notes while at the same time maintaining relative consistency of eye contact with the interviewee.

An interesting point made in the feedback and which became apparent in the conduct of the first pilot interviews was that it may have been prudent to give the interviewees a general indication of the type of areas which would be covered in the interview some time before the interviews so that they could gather their thoughts on the particular areas under discussion or emerging from the interview framework. While the pilot interviewees seemed generally happy with the interview probing it did become apparent that they were at some stages struggling to gather any real coherent thought on particular issues. Thus one interviewee in attempting to itemise benefits of partnership remarked that he hadn't really thought about it and struggled to give anything more than a quick instinctive response. Accordingly for subsequent interviews I telephoned the interviewee or spoke directly to them the day before or some hours before the actual interview and told them that the interview would cover areas such as their expectations of partnership, the issue of the purpose of same and the

outcomes/benefits of same for the participants and the role, if any, of partnership in public sector modernisation.

The piloting of the initial interview framework resulted in an amended set of questions which edited some and amalgamated others in order to avoid overlapping and re-ordered the sequence in some respects. This is indicated below in the final interview guide;

1. When did your “involvement” in partnership begin? (changed from “interest” as piloted interviewees had been effectively appointed to the committee and disclaimed any particular interest in the topic when so appointed)
2. Did you have any particular expectations of what partnership would involve at the outset?(amended to reflect possibility that some persons may have had no expectations)
3. What in your opinion is the central purpose of partnership? (reworded to simplify and focus the question – replaces previous question no. 4)
4. Do you think that there is general agreement on the purpose of partnership at the central partnership committee? (new question relating to perception of consensus)
5. Do you think both sides benefit from partnership and, if so, in what ways? (Consolidation of previous questions).
6. Do you think benefits are evenly distributed between management and staff? (Simpler wording)
7. What in your experience has been the most significant item on the partnership agenda over the past three years? (No change except sequencing as pilots both indicated action plans as most significant item)
8. Do you have an opinion on what role partnership plays in public sector modernisation and what role do you think it should play? (Consolidation of previous question 8 and 9)
9. Do you think the partnership agenda should be broadened? (No change)
10. Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the operation of partnership- has it met your expectations. Indicate on a scale of 1 – 5 with 1 being very satisfied and 5 being very dissatisfied. (No change)

11. Are there any changes you would like to see in the operation of partnership or outcomes of same. (Wording amended to avoid leading interviewee into assuming changes are necessary)
12. Are there any other additional points you would like to make in relation to the partnership process? (No substantial change)

The interview guide questions are predominantly open ended thus suiting the essential exploratory qualitative nature of the research. Only questions 6, 7 and 10 of the final guide are fairly closed type questions aimed at eliciting more clearcut definite responses.

This concludes the chapter on research methodology.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

All of the interviewees appeared relaxed and relatively enthusiastic about the opportunity to discuss their particular views on and experiences of partnership and accordingly a significant level of information was generated by the interview process. A general summary of the findings is now attempted on a broad thematic basis which draws mainly on the themes developed out of the literature review and specified in the research aims and objectives. For ease of reference the analysis where appropriate refers to management and “union” respondents the latter term being used to cover union/staff members of the committee. Furthermore having regard to the relatively small panel of interviewees it is not intended to indicate percentages of interviewees where a statistical breakdown is being used for illustrative purposes but to simply refer to the actual numbers in question. Also the practice in house is to designate the traditional collective bargaining process as IR (Industrial Relations) and where this term is used it should be interpreted as referring to that process.

Expectations/Purpose of Partnership

One of the main obvious findings from the research was the divergence of views on these matters between the interviewees but in particular between management and union representatives. The management representatives in the main clearly identify the partnership process as being firmly within the realm of an exercise in employee consultation on the range of items on the partnership agenda and that it is not intended to be a replacement for management decision making. Thus responses from management representatives on this issue include the following comments

“allows staff to express their views”

“facilitates good communication between management and staff”

“not a decision making body”

One management representative was quite deliberately specific in offering the opinion that partnership should not be considered to have the ability to interfere with ultimate management prerogative or to hamstring every manager by people (presumably union/staff) believing that certain matters cannot be implemented unless partnership had agreed to same. Obviously it was recognised that partnership does make decisions but the sense of the management thrust was that these decisions were not necessarily to be considered to be in substitution for the separate management decision making system and could ultimately be superseded by the main (management) decision making system in the organisation. The position outlined here was slightly qualified by another management interviewee who noted that as very senior management personnel were on the Central Partnership Committee it would be expected that decisions agreed to at partnership were unlikely to be subject to subsequent top management veto anyway. However the essential point remained the same in the sense that management retained the ability to block the making or implementation of decisions either at partnership or subsequent to it if it felt they were ultimately not in the best interest of the organisation. In this context it should be noted that decisions at the partnership committee can only be made by general consensus and not by majority vote. The management position exposed by the research findings reflects the same age old debate about the exact nature and scope of participation/partnership and its effect if any on management decision-making prerogative. However the research findings in respect of the union interviewees clearly indicate that they do not have overly unrealistic expectations that partnership was intended to enable staff have an effective veto over management decision making or that partnership was worker control or a version of real democracy in the workplace. Rather it appears evident from the range of union responses that generally union representatives viewed partnership as a forum through which staff could seek to influence and inform management of the staff perspective on agenda items – the following selection of typical union quotes indicates the general thrust of the research findings in this regard ;

“partnership can be used to influence, raise issues and express dissatisfaction”

“A discussion forum like partnership is a good thing”

“Partnership can kick off discussions and make things change in a positive way”

“One of the purposes of partnership is to incorporate employees of the Board into the decision making process”

“At least partnership allows matters of concern to staff get raised and talked about even if nothing is done or the points are not accepted”

One union interviewee however indicated that it was assumed that partnership would be the final decision making body (although its agenda would be restricted to minor matters only) but that its operation in practice was perceived negatively as amounting to no more than an “sounding board” or “talking shop” and as such may be a “waste of time”.

Another point made about the status of decisions made at partnership by union interviewees was that the profile of the representatives at partnership would suggest that if anyone should have a veto over partnership decisions it should be the union. While the very senior management people at partnership were unlikely to agree to anything that would be unacceptable to management outside of partnership the union representatives at partnership were not the front bench of in-house union negotiators but were mainly second tier union activists/members who could not be said to be negotiating on behalf of the official union structure at partnership. Accordingly they were more liable to agree to something at partnership that the union might object to in the collective bargaining arena. It should be noted in this context that the second generation of partnership now operating in An Bord Pleanála was based on an agreed protocol that either side could stop discussion on any issue at partnership or not agree to discuss it at all if it was considered to constitute or be straying to areas which were “industrial relations” issues and should therefore be dealt with in the collective bargaining arena. It should also be noted however that the Action Plan Verification Process/Modernisation Agenda has effectively forced industrial relations issues onto the agenda in recent times, the most contentious being on-going co-operation with implementation of significant work and staff re-organisation arising from the commencing of the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act, 2006.

In dealing with the questions relating to expectations/purpose of partnership all of the interviewees raised the issue of there being a large degree of confusion about the inter-relationship between partnership and the traditional industrial relations system.

From a management perspective this is reflected in the comment of one management interviewee that if the partnership committee agree on an issue then, given the presence of union people on partnership, it would be expected that this can be interpreted as the union agreeing to same as well. Significantly all of the union interviewees expressed anxiety about role confusion in this context and that no real clarity existed on the relationship between partnership and “normal” industrial relations. An interesting perspective emanated from union interviewees in discussing expectations of partnership in that two of same expressed the view that they assumed the partnership project to be aimed at putting a system in place which would in time wholly replace the traditional industrial relations system. This may reflect a long term strategic intent underlying the National Centre for Partnerships and Performance analysis of the process and a theme which was also reflected by O’Dowd (1998a). This view sought to retain partnership within a pluralist framework with the continuing existence of independent trade union representation but saw partnership as having the potential to ultimately become the forum for the discussion and potential resolution of all in-house staff-management issues. Such a scenario would overcome the confusion between parallel partnership and traditional collective bargaining in-house arenas. However another union interviewee in expressing a degree of frustration at the confusion between the two systems considered that all of the business could be done through the traditional industrial relations system anyway and that it might be preferable to stick with that system and forget about partnership altogether.

However it is interesting to note that all sides appear to agree that the operation of partnership even with its initial limited agenda restricting discussion of major industrial relations issues, has a value in terms of facilitating discussion in a more relaxed atmosphere – this is reflected in the following representative quotes from both sides –

“There is more openness at partnership – it’s a better way of dealing with things” (union)

“It’s a better way of sitting down and having a general chat about things” (management)

“There is less bad blood at partnership....it is a better co-operative atmosphere (union)

“can discuss matters at partnership without IR rancour (management)

“Partnership involves people getting together in a non-confrontational way to try and reach agreement” (union)

Thus at least the potential of partnership as a forum to facilitate discussion and resolution of issues as a result of it being conducted in a less pressurised atmosphere than the traditional adversarial industrial relations arena appears to be acknowledged by all sides as a feature of partnership and as a progressive characteristic of same. While IR issues were originally intended to be screened out of partnership it is clear that all sides now appear to accept that if partnership is to have any real purpose in the organisation then it should be enabled deal with certain issues which might have an IR dimension or the potential to develop an IR dimension. The central partnership committee, aside from the Action Plan process, has also in fact dealt with significant issues such as accommodation and allocation of space within the headquarters building which is an issue with definite IR potential. This shifting of the agenda between partnership and IR was referred to by most of the interviewees leading to one conclusion that the operation of partnership could be characterised as “IR light” (union interviewee). A management interviewee remarked that partnership can and should function to head off or siphon off elements or issues from the IR arena and deal with them thus reducing the volume of matters in IR. This appears to reflect a finding that the participants in partnership accept the developing logic that partnership has the potential and is already being used in effect as a quasi-collective bargaining tool although dealing with to a large extent lower level or less contentious items.

A final issue arose implicitly and in some cases explicitly in the research even though it was not part of the intended research focus or raised in the interview guide and that was the issue of “trust”. Again this arose out of the general linkage by the interviewees of their views on the purpose of partnership with its interface with the traditional industrial relations system. As advised in the introduction the recent history of industrial relations in An Bord Pleanála

could be described as poor and the incidence of use of third party conciliation and arbitration exposes a general lack of consensus and trust between the players in that arena. Three of the management interviewees raised the centrality of trust between the parties as a prerequisite to the effective operation of partnership (one used the term “openness” in this context) and they felt that this was probably retarding the emergence of ideal conditions for partnership to thrive. The theme was central to one management interviewee contribution and in that contribution it was acknowledged that while IR was presently fraught with lack of trust it was considered that greater trust can be generated at partnership and that this could then help to dissipate lack of trust in the IR arena. However the two way nature of this relationship was also acknowledged. Union interviewees mentioned trust in a more round-about way by referring to the perception that in partnership IR positions were “under the surface” and that there was an element of pretence about some supposedly open discussions as people were aware that deep seated underlying IR position were the basis of views being offered at partnership (this applied to both sides). This was considered to be hampering an open minded approach to partnership on certain items and effectively importing these usually irreconcilable bargaining positions into the process.

The research found that all of the interviewees agreed that there was no consensus on the exact purpose of partnership with one interviewee offering the opinion that “nobody is clear on partnership”. However I would consider that the research indicates that there is a good degree of common understanding on partnership’s relationship with management decision making prerogative (it remains) and the value of partnership in enabling staff input to decision making. The greatest source of confusion appeared to be rather the lack of a coherent interface between partnership and the traditional industrial relations system in the organisation.

The research findings in respect of expectations of partnership were mixed and in fact the majority of interviewees indicated that they had no real coherent or clearcut expectations of the process at the outset of their involvement.

The research finding in this section of the report can be summarised as follows;

- There is no apparent agreed consensus on the purpose of partnership.
- The greatest area causing confusion about partnership is its relationship with existing traditional collective bargaining structures.
- While management might fear its decision making prerogative is threatened by partnership there is no evidence that staff believe that partnership is intended to fulfil such a role.
- All parties to partnership agree that it enables staff have an input to decision making.
- Lack of trust derived from collective bargaining can have a negative impact on partnership.

Who benefits from Partnership?

The literature review has revealed that the question of whether the gains from partnership can be quantified and whether they are mutually distributed is a central component in the pluralist model of partnership (Baglioni ,1996; Kochan and Osterman, 1994; Hayes and Allen, 2001).

While financial involvement offers a transparent means of providing gains this potential is severely constrained in the non-commercial public sector environment. The findings of the research reveal that all interviewees felt that there were gains from the process. However the majority of union interviewees indicated a belief that the gains were more heavily balanced in favour of management. Two union interviewees offered the view that the gains were split evenly between management and staff. Management interviewees gave mixed responses to this question with two holding the view that management gained more than staff, one indicating that the gains were evenly split and one suggesting that staff got more gains than management from the process. The union interviewees were in general consistent in positing the view that the partnership agenda was effectively driven and controlled by management and that this tendency was reinforced by the Action Plan verification process which was effectively a management agenda although externally imposed.

The thrust of the union perspective can be gauged from the following typical quotes;

“Partnership is run by management even though the chair is rotated”

“Work related needs generate the partnership agenda”

“Partnership was never going to be an equal playing field”

The final comment was made in the context of the expression of a view that in effect partnership is part of the management function and that its logistical arrangements are controlled by management and the management representatives on the partnership committee were seasoned and experienced negotiators. Attending to partnership was effectively part of their paid work role whereas the staff representatives were only volunteers who were involved in partnership at a level outside of but in addition to their normal work roles.

The Union interviewees did however, after some reflection and a little probing, agree that notwithstanding the perceived limitations of their position at partnership they were able to claim benefits and successes from partnership by ensuring that items which they perceived to be important and to some extent neglected by management could and were raised by them at partnership. They highlighted areas such as training and development initiatives, adoption and development of progressive personnel policies on a range of areas including employee assistance and flexible working and investigations into and resolution of certain accommodation problems as items they had raised and progressed through partnership. Essentially the central point made by the union interviewees was that partnership gave staff a forum where it could formally raise issues which might not necessarily otherwise surface or be dealt with either in the IR arena or the normal management structure and that this general principle was a significant benefit in itself. One contribution from the union side indicated that this facility seemed in some cases to give an ability to hold management to account and make it uncomfortable in respect of certain issues where it may not have fulfilled certain obligations or commitments for example meeting a targeted annual spend on training and development.

The union perspective on its own perceived limited ability to work towards gains does reflect however the pluralist tradition in that the gains do not appear to necessarily reflect adoption of successes related to modernisation or the business agenda as being successes which staff could claim for itself – these were rather perceived as management only benefits. This issue was raised by the one management representative who considered that the staff side benefited more from the process. This interviewee expressed disappointment that the staff side seemed to focus on “getting items solely related to staff interests” through partnership rather than engaging in a meaningful way towards seeking ways of improving overall organisation performance. Otherwise the management interviewees in general inclined towards emphasising the benefits accruing to management as on-going co-operation with modernisation and change initiatives and a lessening of industrial relations tension surrounding such initiatives. However the management interviewee who asserted that the gains were evenly distributed commended the staff side for “having affected the partnership agenda positively in its favour” but also advised of a feeling that it appeared that “staff might not actually realise this”.

Adopting a more strategic outlook two management interviewees suggested that a major benefit for management was the ability to harness input from all levels of the organisation to operational and strategic matters and thus improve the quality of decision making in the organisation. Furthermore this opportunity for staff involvement was considered likely to lead to “happier staff, more engaged staff and thus more productive staff” thus reflecting the broad behavioural science /strategic human resource management tradition.

The research findings on the attitudes/perceptions to the beneficiaries of partnership can be summarised as follows;

- All agree that partnership benefits the organisation and that there are mutual gains.
- There is a general perception that the benefits of partnership are more heavily distributed in favour of management.
- Staff and management do however believe that staff can influence the partnership agenda in significant areas and in so doing accrue benefits to itself from the process.

The Modernisation Agenda and Partnership

Reflecting the intensive Government/NCPP push towards a more coherent mainstreaming of second generation partnership in the public sector by way primarily of the Action Plan verification process and the resultant linkage of pay with partnership it was not a surprise that seven out of the nine interviewees identified the Action Plan process as the most significant item on the partnership agenda over the last three years (the remaining two interviewees indicated accommodation and training as their choices in this regard).

The union interviewees in commenting on the role of partnership in driving modernisation and change were generally critical of the imposition of what was perceived as an “external” agenda and a significant process burden on partnership. One union interviewee suggested that modernisation could be done by management anyway and not through partnership but admitted when probed on why it was considered necessary or appropriate to seek to advance it through partnership considered that it was probably felt to be a good way of doing it in order to pre-empt potential union intransigence. In effect it thus amounted to a by-pass of collective bargaining with respect to implementation of the elements of the modernisation programme but the interviewee raised no great objection to this. The initial reactions of the union interviewees to the Action Plan/pay framework can be gauged by the following typical quotes ;

“Axe over people’s head”

“Goading people to think and respond in a certain way”

“Forced modernisation won’t work”

“The Action Plan process is satisfying headings in documents rather than addressing real issues”

“You can’t force people to change overnight – they have to be willing to change”

Accordingly the findings reveal a certain degree of disquiet among union interviewees about this aspect of the partnership agenda and a reluctance to positively regard partnership as an actual driver of change. Furthermore one of the union interviewees suggested that the Action Plan verification process was actually delaying progress on modernisation by giving the illusion of same and that the process was somewhat artificial and contrived. The union interviewees did not appear to be against modernisation as such but rather the manner of its proposed facilitation/imposition by the Action Plan process and pay linkage. However they appeared to accept the fact that it did centrally cement commitment to modernisation by unions and staff and in so doing removed any potential for principled opposition to the individual elements of the general modernisation scheme such as the introduction of performance management initiatives. Management interviewees noted that partnership now played a significant role in seeking to drive modernisation and that this could be a success attributed to partnership. One management interviewee enthused that

“the Action Plan verification process is the best thing that happened to partnership and has made partnership work by forcing engagement by staff and management on the modernisation agenda”.

This manager cited the introduction of the performance management and development system as an initiative which may have been resisted by the union or ignored due to management inertia if it had not been a required element of the performance verification process. Accordingly this perspective supported the external threat of sanction by way of withholding of pay increases as a very useful and appropriate driver of change. The pay linkage was also considered to be a key factor in increasing the profile and credibility of partnership within the organisation as it encouraged a widespread focus on the operation and outcome of that element of the partnership process. Other management interviewees while expressing no opposition to the idea of the centrality of partnership to change and modernisation expressed more cautious or sceptical views about the direct correlation between partnership per se and modernisation. Thus one commented that “signing off to get pay does not necessarily drive change or provide evidence of real commitment to change” thus echoing to some degree the views expressed by the union interviewees. However management interviewees also generally indicated that the change/modernisation process was also been driven separately outside of

partnership anyway by the normal management structures working to improve overall performance through a range of human resource and structural initiatives and individual line management coaching and performance management.

The research findings in respect of the modernisation agenda and its relationship with partnership can thus be summarised as follows;

- The majority of interviewees believed that the Action Plan Verification Process was the most significant item on the partnership agenda in recent times.
- Union interviewees appeared reluctant to be enthusiastic about the linkage between partnership and modernisation and a view was expressed that the connection was not really valid.
- Management was generally happy with the linkage and the significant role the verification process plays in driving modernisation although there was some scepticism that partnership was or could be the sole driver of change.

Other issues raised in the Research;

Communications;

All of the interviewees cited *poor communications* as a serious impediment to the profile and operation of partnership. The crux of this problem was perceived to be the lack of consistent and timely information from the central committee outwards to the general staff body. Some management interviewees also expressed a view that communication between union representative on the central committee and union representative involved in collective bargaining was poor.

Public Sector Management Training;

One management interviewee saw the lack of training of public sector managers and in particular line managers as a serious flaw in the overall coherence of the partnership process. This was considered important because line managers were and should be in the front line of change drivers yet they generally lacked the training necessary to develop competencies in the people management hard and soft skills which were important to alternatively drive and encourage performance.

Method of Selecting Union Representatives;

Two union interviewees raised the issue of how union representatives were selected to go on the partnership committee. As at present these were not-elected and effectively volunteered following requests from in-house Union Branch officers it was felt that this contributed to their role confusion at partnership as they had no democratic mandate.

Conclusion of Research Findings – Level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with Partnership

The question was put to all interviewees as to whether they could quantify their levels of satisfaction/dissatisfaction on a Likert scale where one represented very satisfied and five represented very dissatisfied – the results are indicated below;

Management Responses	Union Responses
2	5
3	3
2	4
3	4
	3

Thus it can be stated that Management were generally fairly satisfied while union /staff were generally fairly dissatisfied.

This concludes the section on research findings.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter will seek to contextualise and interpret the findings of the research by way of a general discussion having regard to some of the main themes identified in the literature review. It will also seek to do so by analysing the findings with particular regard to whether they offer any guidance on whether the experience of second generation partnership in this particular organisational context reveals any levels of relative movement in the enablers/blockers of partnership as earlier identified by the National Centre for Partnership and Performance. The chapter also offers a conclusion on the points advanced as research objectives and whether the findings can be considered to support or contradict the hypotheses set out in the Research Aims and Objectives section. Finally some thoughts will be offered on what the future might hold for partnership in the public sector together with pointers towards other potential avenues for research into the topic which the findings might suggest as appropriate or meaningful avenues at this stage.

General Discussion of Findings

One of the main themes in the literature review was the idea that the participatory/partnership tradition has two distinct origins, one from a worker perspective and one from an employer/management viewpoint (Baglioni, 1996; Walker, 1982) While it is not explicitly revealed in the findings there does appear to be a consistent thread in the findings revealing that these traditions are still driving fundamental different predispositions to partnership. Thus while the findings reveal that management is clearly focussed on the value of partnership in terms of progressing the business or organisational agenda the union interviewees appear to focus (in terms of favourable outcomes) on the worth of partnership to them as being related to improving or advancing their own particular rights and interests without any particular significant reference to or concern for the business agenda. While it may not be as stark as distributive collective bargaining it suggests that each side may nevertheless see partnership as a forum to get something out of the other side rather than as a place where integrative connections can be explored and fostered at no one sides expense. The research findings do not therefore indicate any real move into a close integrative collaboration around organisational goals.

However this is hardly surprising given the fact that partnership is only evolving and is pitted against a long standing tradition of adversarial collective bargaining and in this particular organisational context a current difficult industrial relations atmosphere. This general theme is reflective of the pluralist versus unitarist perspective of partnership (Guest and Peccei, 2001) with the strength of the pluralist tradition possibly operating as a brake on the emergence of real partnership coherence around the centrality of the business objectives. Thus it could be argued that the findings reveal partnership actually has more obvious coherence within a unitarist non-union environment where there is no real interference from what is in effect a third party in the employment relationship (an independent trade union source) – this is the logic of participative non-union strategic human resource management and the initiatives which promote unfettered direct contact with employees. The research evidence seems to surface this complication in the clear expression by all sides of the difficulty in resolving the relationship of partnership with the existing industrial relations system. While a lot of commentators (Guest and Peccei, 2001; Dundon et al., 2006) had posited the belief that such parallel systems, one operating adversarial collective bargaining and the other seeking co-operative collaboration, are a logical outcome of an overarching pluralist framework the practical difficulties of reconciling same into a coherent model of employment relations may on the basis of these research findings have been severely underestimated.

The research findings in terms of the outcomes of partnership as perceived by the respective parties do however suggest support for the strength of mutual gains as a necessary fundamental pillar to the process particularly for the union side (Kochan and Osterman, 1994; O'Dowd, 1998a). While the research finding that the union side were generally dissatisfied with partnership seemingly contradicts Baglioni's assertion (1996) that partnership type arrangements are presumed to operate in favour of employee interests I would interpret same as being more indicative of simple expression of the perception of management power in controlling and driving the partnership agenda in the fashion of the "constrained mutuality" concept as indicated by Guest and Peccei (2001). Thus while union interviewees may have been dissatisfied by partnership they still generally maintained a positive attitude towards same and acknowledged that they had made significant gains and benefits from same which they might otherwise not have achieved.

Findings By Reference to Blockers/Enablers of Partnership

The roll out of “first generation” partnership in the public sector was seen to have encountered a range of blockers to its smooth integration as a new way of doing business and it is considered useful to revisit these to explore whether the research findings indicate any significant diminution of same or an increase in the strength of the enablers of partnership .

Blockers

Hierarchical Management Culture/Style

One of the management interviewees clearly identified lack of public sector management training as a significant problem in the whole process and this could definitely be interpreted as bemoaning the lack of will or ability to deliver a more open and participative management style throughout the organisation. This may also be reflected in the union interviewees emphasis on their sense that in general terms management was in control of the agenda: Management interviewees emphasis on the retention of ultimate management prerogative may also indicate its concern to ensure that hierarchical control is maintained. Accordingly the findings suggest that this cultural impediment is strongly present.

Limited Shared Understanding of Partnership

It appears that the findings indicate some degree of consensus on the role of partnership as enabling staff **influence** management decision making rather than a co-determination mechanism. However there remains clear uncertainty about its relationship with the traditional industrial relations structures.

Consultation Perfunctory not robust

No clear evidence on this but some union interviewees appeared sceptical that management would be open to amending its views if same had already been determined by it in advance of partnership engagement with staff.

Agenda Perceived as Management Driven

Union interviewees clearly held this view.

Partnership Peripheral

All appear to agree that the Action Plan verification process and pay linkage has moved partnership to centre stage in the organisation. However this has really been an externally imposed element and has not been the result of in-house partnership organically promoting itself to centre stage by virtue of its diffusion throughout the organisation. This is reinforced by the clear concern that the partnership process has a major communications deficit in connecting to staff at all levels of the organisation.

Low Trust

This was a clear finding from the research in the sense that low trust in the collective bargaining arena was clearly impeding the emergence of open or hidden agenda free discussions at partnership – however the research findings in terms of the general positive tone of the interviewees towards partnership reveal a sense of cautious optimism that partnership has the potential to build trust or repair damaged relationships by way of its co-operative style atmosphere.

In terms of the strength of enablers of partnership it appears clear that the findings do reveal evidence of the perception of mutual gains from the process and that operational and strategic items feature on the agenda of partnership. Most of the other enablers are the reverse of the blockers already discussed but one of same is worthy of further exploration by reference to

the research findings is the need to mainstream partnership as a central process driving change/modernisation. While the Action Plan verification process and pay linkage has centrally involved partnership in the change process there is clear evidence that the participants in partnership may not be fully engaged with this role of partnership. There was a clear sense that the bulk of the interviewees considered the Action Plan process more as a bureaucratic exercise in box ticking rather than as an active driver of the change process. Thus it was a general reflection of the findings that notwithstanding the action plan verification process partnership itself was not really driving change to the extent or in the way envisaged by the National Centre for Partnership and Performance.

The dissertation objectives/hypotheses and research findings

Objectives

Expectations of Partnership; Findings are not as clear as expected as most interviewees were not sure of on what partnership would involve and therefore had no clearly defined expectations but more of an open mind at the outset.

Purpose of Partnership; General agreement on consultative and co-operative nature of same but both sides reflect union/management divergence on the general approach to purpose of partnership (business agenda versus employee rights/interests).

Mutual gains; While predominantly in favour of management and achievement of the business agenda there is consensus that mutual gains are outcomes of partnership.

Modernisation Project; Is supportive of raising profile of partnership but because of the contrived and externally imposed nature of the Action Plan process it may not be actually driving change on the ground.

The working hypotheses of the dissertation were as follows;

“Partnership in the public sector may be operating solely as a device to facilitate the introduction and implementation of more flexible working arrangements rather than an attempt to provide for meaningful staff participation in the organisation. The operation of Partnership may not be meeting the expectations of the participants.”

In my view the first element of the hypotheses is not proven by the research. This is primarily because notwithstanding the intended thrust of the official partnership model to embrace the business agenda and modernisation as the focus/purpose of partnership, union/staff representatives have in some senses fought a successful rearguard action to force items onto the partnership agenda which relate to their own concerns and particular interests. Thus it may be true that while partnership may be designed and driven to achieve a certain purpose it can in practice be driven off tangent by the forces operating it on the ground as was suggested by some of the commentators (Walker, 1982; Mason, Heaton and Morgan, 2004).

Thus while the thrust of partnership is still driven by the modernisation project the union side if it is sufficiently proactive can struggle to impose its particular agenda on partnership and in so doing turn the process to its particular advantage as well.

The second part of the hypotheses may also be considered not to have been definitively supported by the research findings notwithstanding the expressed overall general dissatisfaction of the union interviewees. This is because the general tone of the interviewees appeared to remain positive to partnership and there was a clear perception of mutual gains. Furthermore it is recognised that the general confusion surrounding partnership militated against the development of clear expectations against which experiences and outcomes of partnership could be measured.

The Future for Partnership

Having undertaken the research process I consider that the positive attitudes to partnership do reveal its potential over time to drive superior organisational performance in the public sector. It is easy to be sceptical about partnership but it must be realised and acknowledged that it is being developed against a backdrop of longstanding ingrained cultural impediments operating in the public sector. These are –

- A legacy of traditional hierarchical command and control style management.
- A legacy of traditional adversarial collective bargaining.

To believe that these powerful cultural traditions can be unwound in the space of a few years is not a realistic position. The emergence of a modern strategic human resource management and performance focus in the public sector is to be welcomed as long overdue and, in the context of the coherence of partnership, this focus must include real and vigorous efforts to ensure that a participative management style is diffused throughout public sector organisations. It is only when this happens that the official management systems would begin to reflect partnership principles and thus become congruent with and mutually supportive to other partnership structures such as central committees. In the absence of the roll out of such practices partnership may remain stifled by incongruent management styles.

Similarly it has been recognised that the partnership and collective bargaining machinery should ideally be mutually supportive. In essence this is likely only to emerge within a high trust relationship between the parties. However where industrial relations problems may exist in an organisation it is good to have a forum where there is an opportunity to make steps at rebuilding trust and encouraging a co-operative atmosphere. Thus partnership itself has the capacity to influence the collective bargaining behaviours and attitudes of the parties and it may not be too far fetched to envisage a time when partnership can incorporate collective bargaining and become the main way of doing business (as was suggested by two union interviewees in the course of the research). However while this may be some way down the road in this particular organisational context the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (2002b; 2005b) has found some evidence of good partnership progress in the

public sector in circumstances where better congruence has been achieved between management style and practices , partnership and collective bargaining. Accordingly partnership may be an appropriate starting place to spark efforts at aligning these processes so that a truly co-operative working relationship may emerge at all levels across the organisation.

Future Research

Obviously as a particular case study it is not claimed that this research can be claimed as reflecting the experiences of other public sector organisations and in that sense it is a limited and modest contribution to evaluating aspects of second generation partnership. It would be interesting to seek to replicate the study in other organisations in the public sector to see if the findings elsewhere reflect similar outcomes and attitudes. This no doubt will likely be a focus of further NCPP research. Another potential interesting area for research might be to seek to explore the views and attitudes of general staff outside of those directly involved in partnership structures as a measure of the real diffusion of partnership within an organisation.

This concludes the dissertation.

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APPENDIX 'A'

UNION BULLETIN

Partnership 2000. Modernising the Civil Service
IMPACT Information Bulletin No. 3
April 1998

Background.

Partnership 2000 is the fourth in a series of partnership agreements, commencing in 1987, between the social partners and Government at national level. There is clear evidence that this partnership approach at a national level has contributed significantly to the present levels of economic growth and development and to the significant increases in employment and in living standards.

The Partnership 2000 agreement covers a range of social and economic issues. For example, for employees it provides for improvements in living standards through a combination of pay and taxation adjustments. It also provides for measures to enhance the competitiveness of enterprises and in the case of the public service provides for the implementation of the modernisation programme. Unlike the Programme for Competitiveness and Work when the "grade" increases were linked to agreement on specific flexibility and productivity measures, Partnership 2000 increases (general and grade) are both linked to agreement on the modernisation programme with payment of the 2% local bargaining clause linked to the verified progress on the implementation of the modernisation programme. In the Civil Service context the modernisation programme includes the Strategic Management Initiative. Departmental programmes are set out in their Statements of Strategy.

Partnership 2000 provides for agreement on the substance of change in the Public Service on the lines set out in Chapter 10 on Modernisation. However, the form in which such change is to be delivered is not prescribed and this is left to local discussions and negotiations. Partnership 2000 also ensures that a partnership approach is not confined to the Social Partners at national level. It requires that the partnership approach be implemented in each employment, at various levels and must involve management (at all levels), unions and staff (again, at all levels).

Definition of Partnership

Partnership means different things to different people. Partnership 2000 (paras 9.8 and 9.9) defines Partnership as follows

“ Partnership is an active relationship based on recognition of a common interest to secure the competitiveness, viability and prosperity of the enterprise. It involves a continuous commitment by employees to improvements in quality and efficiency; and the acceptance, by employers of employees as stakeholders with rights and interests to be considered in the context of major decisions affecting their employment.

Partnership involves common ownership of the resolution of challenges, involving the direct participation of employees/representatives and an investment in their training, development and working environment.”

This definition is written primarily from a private sector commercial perspective. However, the principles contained in the definition apply also in the Public Service.

It is clear that Partnership in the Partnership 2000 context

- * *is a process, not an event, involving a combination of consultation, negotiation and bargaining in relation to organisational change.*
- * *involves a shared understanding of the key mechanisms and relationships.*
- * *involves interdependence on partnership matters.*
- * *is characterised by a problem solving approach designed to produce consensus on partnership issues.*
- * *involves trade offs between and within the parties to the Partnership.*
- * *is a relationship based on trust.*
- * *involves staff and unions being accepted as stakeholders with rights and interests to be considered in the context of decisions involving the employment.*
- * *involves consultation and involvement by staff and unions in the design and implementation of policy and change generally.*
- * *involves acceptance by staff and unions of the need for continuous organisational change and improvement in services.*
- * *involves agreement on issues to be dealt with through the Partnership structures and agreement on these structures.*

It is also clear that that this Partnership is not

* *a state on industrial relations harmony*

- * *a state of total mutuality of interests.*
- * *patronising "consultation" by management.*
- * *a form of non-union paternalism.*
- * *structured adversity*
- * *a system to by pass the normal management/union industrial relations negotiations or procedures.*
- * *an agreement by management to carry out it's role solely or exclusively through the partnership process.*
- * *A surrender of the rights of any of the parties.*

Objectives of Partnership.

Partnership 2000 (para 9.10) sets out the objectives of enterprise Partnership as follows:

"9.10 The objectives of enterprise partnerships are:

- * *to enhance the prosperity and success of the enterprise.*
- * *to create the basis and arrangements for discussion of major decisions affecting the organisation's future, including future economic security.*
- * *to engage all stakeholders ideas, abilities and commitment; and*
- * *to enhance the quality of the work environment."*

Again this is written primarily from a private sector perspective.

A similar set of objectives for the Civil Service might read as follows:

- * to enhance the quality of services to the public through improvements in organisational flexibility and efficiency and through the identification and implementation of best practice.
- * to engage all stakeholders (management, staff, unions) ideas, abilities and commitment leading to better decision making at all levels within the employment.
- * to create the structures to discuss the major decisions affecting the employment.
- * to facilitate a better two way flow of communication and information within the employment.

- * to achieve joint ownership by management, staff and unions of strategic and ongoing change within the employment.
- * to enhance the quality of the work environment.

Partnership and Industrial Relations issues.

The primary focus of the new Partnership structures will be to deal with the design and implementation of organisational change to improve the quality of services.

These structures will not deal with the industrial relations implications of such change. Such implications will continue to be dealt with and negotiated through the established industrial relations machinery both formal and informal. Many change implementation issues have in the past, in the absence of adequate consultation and involvement of staff and while not having a significant (if at all) industrial relations dimension, become part of the adversarial industrial relations system. It is expected that such issues should be capable of being dealt to conclusion with through the Partnership structures.

While the Partnership structures will not deal with industrial relations it is expected that the partnership principles will progressively reduce the traditional adversarial approach to dealing with industrial relations issues.

Many PCW "flexibility" agreements provided that Unions will be consulted in advance of any significant change to enable their views to be considered prior to the implementation of such change. These agreements must continue to be honoured. The Partnership structures are not an acceptable alternative to such advance consultation and cannot be used to change existing agreements.

Partnership Topics

Examples of Partnership topics are set out in Para 9.15 of Partnership 2000.

Some possible topics for discussion in Civil Service Departmental/Office partnership structures are:

- * Partnership Programme Implementation and Verification
- * Action Programmes from Strategy Statement.
- * Input into Strategy Statement and Business Plans
- * Mechanisms for Staff involvement in Partnership
- * Training, Personal Development
- * Implementation of new forms of work organisation
- * Work Environment
- * Implementation of Change
- * Arrangements to facilitate adaptability, flexibility and innovation.

- * Arrangements to improve customer services

While the Partnership structures are designed to in the first instance deal with the implementation of the Modernisation Programme as set out in Partnership 2000, it is the intention that Partnership will become a new way of doing business in the Civil Service well after Partnership 2000 ends.

Stakeholders and Partners.

In a commercial private company the stakeholders are the shareholders, the management (including the Board of Directors), the staff (and their Unions) and the customers.

In the Civil Service context the stakeholders are:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| * <i>The Government</i> | * <i>Management (including line Management)</i> |
| * <i>The Social Partners</i> | * <i>Staff (at all levels)</i> |
| * <i>The General Public</i> | * <i>Unions.</i> |

Policy is ultimately a matter for Oireachtas and Government decision and this is influenced by the Social Partners and by the general public. Input into policy choices and decisions is also made by Civil Service management directly to ministerial and Government levels. In the context of the Public Service Management Act, the Departmental Strategy Statements will reflect the policy decisions and the mechanisms to implement them. Lessons are also learned from the implementation of policy and from an evaluation of it's affects and this is, in turn, fed back into the system to enhance and fine tune policy choice.

The implementation of policy and change will be dealt with through the Partnership structures. The Partners involved in these structures are

- * Management (including line management)
- * Staff (at all levels)
- * Unions

These structures are dealt with below.

The broad objectives of Partnership are set out above.

The methodology for decision making is characterised by a problem solving approach designed to produce consensus on Partnership issues. As such, while each of the partners will enter the structures through a different route and with different objectives and interests, the outcome, if Partnership is to work, must reflect a broad consensus and not the 'victory' of one viewpoint or side over another. In that context staff and Union nominees are present not as "representatives" of the staff reflecting their traditional role and approach but as equals with management seeking the best solutions to the issues under consideration.

However, this does not mean that the Partners should ignore their background or fail to reflect views which they believe will be relevant in ensuring a successful outcome to the discussions. This could, for example, involve alerting the Partnership Group to the industrial relations implications or to the Government policy implications of the work of the Group. Obviously, such industrial relations or policy implications would have to be addressed in the appropriate forum before the proposed change could be finalised.

Partnership Structures.

The precise structures must of necessity reflect the nature, size etc. of any given Civil Service department or office. Likewise the number of people from all sides will vary. The initial arrangements agreed in departments/offices may vary and change over time, by agreement, in light of experience and changing needs.

Departmental Partnership Committee

This Committee will consist of

- * *management nominees including top management and line management.*
- * *Union nominees (from the dept/office)*
- * *Staff (at all levels).*

A facility will exist to enable full time Union officials and/or other senior management personnel to attend, should the need arise. The aim should be to have a group which is as small as possible whilst broadly reflecting the composition of Unions and types of work and levels within the employment.

For larger departments/offices or where there are, in effect, self contained offices within a Department separate Committees may be required for each of these. The composition and membership of the Partnership Committee should be agreed at Departmental Council level, expanded to include all staff covered by the Conciliation and Arbitration scheme. The terms of office initially should be to the end of 1999 with agreed terms thereafter.

As outlined above the Partnership Committee will not deal with industrial relations and is not a substitute for the normal industrial relations machinery, formal and informal. However, in light of the existence of the Partnership bodies, Departmental Councils could usefully reassess their own arrangements (procedures, meetings, agendas, timing etc.) to take account of the new structures and to avoid overlap.

Sub Departmental Partnership Bodies.

There will be a need for structures - formal, informal, 'permanent' and for "once off" issues - at all levels of the department or office. These could, for example, involve

Intensive Groups

These would be small groups which would be issue/task/topic focussed. They could include

- * *Working Groups (on selected topics)*
- * *Task Forces (as need for selected issues)*
- * *Workshops (to test solutions, ideas etc)*

Extensive Groups

These would be larger groups dealing with consultation/feedback/input. They could include:

- * *Networks*
- * *Focus Groups*
- * *Surveys*
- * *Informal Consultations*

They should involve a mixture of communication and participation.

The Partnership Committee at departmental level should decide on the appropriate approach and mix in the light of local needs and issues. While the form such groups will take is discretionary, their existence is not.

Communications and Information.

The consultation and participation process must be supported by effective two way communications between management and staff to ensure that staff at all levels in the department/office are fully aware and informed of ongoing and imminent developments.

Training and Staff Release

To facilitate the development and operation of the partnership process a joint programme of training for management, staff and Unions, with particular reference to the needs of chairpersons, facilitators, convenors, personnel staff and Union branch personnel, will be drawn up following consultations between management, Unions and the National Centre for Partnership and this will be delivered through the Centre for Management Organisation and Development. Such training will ensure that there is a clear and shared understanding of the nature and purpose of the partnership process and to ensure that partners have the required skills and background knowledge to enable them to make a meaningful contribution to the process. This may be assisted by the use of a facilitator at the training stage(s) and in the initial operation of the departmental/office partnership bodies. Departments/offices must facilitate attendance by management, staff and union nominees at such training and in their preparation and participation, at whatever level, in the partnership process.

Selection and involvement of Staff.

While there is provision for management, staff and Union involvement at all levels, it is likely in practice that the roles of top management and Union nominees will have far greater emphasis at departmental/office level with line management and staff having almost exclusive involvement in the process at local level.

Staff involved in the intensive and extensive processes will be agreed by the departmental/office partnership body.

Initially, the departmental/office partnership body will be bipartite involving management and Unions. However, the intention is to involve staff at that level by agreement as soon as possible. Where there are agreed partnership or consultative procedures already in place this should be possible in the short term. In other cases, these intensive and extensive groups will need to be operational for a short time at least before the selection of staff members is finalised.

Timeframe.

It is essential for the success of the partnership process that matters appropriate to it are dealt with in a timely manner. This is particularly so given that occasionally urgent matters will arise or Government decisions will require urgent implementation. Mechanisms should be agreed in the departmental/office partnership bodies or at Departmental Council as appropriate to facilitate such matters being dealt with, to the maximum extent possible, through the partnership process.

What is in it for 'us'?

All of the partners must be seen to benefit from the partnership process if they are to take ownership of it.

From the employer/management perspective benefits can include

- * commitment by staff and Unions to flexibility, improving efficiency and services.
- * harnessing the talents of the entire workforce
- * higher staff morale, lower absenteeism, staff turnover leading to greater productivity.
- * better industrial relations.

For staff, the benefits can include

- * recognition of their rights and aspirations
- * formal recognition that they are stakeholders with rights
- * better working relations
- * improved working conditions/environment
- * ability to use their talents better.

For Unions, benefits can include

- * enhancing the role and relevance of Unions within the employment.
- * allowing workers and their representatives to influence the strategy and operations of the employment.
- * to improve and enhance services to the public (including Union members) thereby reducing the possibility of services being contracted out.
- * formal acceptance of staff and Unions as stakeholders.

At the end of the day, the success or otherwise of the partnership process will be judged by whether each of the partners believes it is working in their interest and in the common interest.

April 1998

APPENDIX 'B'

ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

Sustaining Progress : Template for Agencies (Department of the Environment and Local Government)

Name of Agency : _____

These 2 columns are extracts from Sustaining Progress and should not be amended		These 2 columns should be completed by the Agency when preparing the Action Plan		These 2 columns should be completed by the Agency when preparing each Progress Reports	
1	2	3	4	5	6
Para.	Commitment to Modernisation of the Public Service	Specific Action <i>[Agencies to identify specific actions which they will undertake to achieve the commitments identified in Column 2]</i>	Date <i>[unless stated, Agencies to identify dates for achievement of specific actions]</i>	Achieved <i>[Yes - Y No - N]</i>	If not yet achieved or did not meet commitment please provide further details
	Efficient Use of Resources				
20.11.	The parties to this Agreement will co-operate fully with the modernisation and change required to ensure that maximum value is achieved from all public expenditure in terms of defined outputs and outcomes.	<p><i>Actions being identified should include the following :</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategy Statements; - Annual Business Plans; - Annual rolling five-year business and financial plans; and - Annual Reports in accordance with specific requirements relating to the agency and/or the requirements set out in the <i>Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.</i> • Measures being undertaken to promote accountability for performance in relation to outputs and outcomes. • Modernisation Initiatives being undertaken to enhance value for money. 			

Note : where the Commitment is not relevant to the agency, reasons should be stated on the table

Sustaining Progress : Template for Agencies (Department of the Environment and Local Government)

Name of Agency : _____

These 2 columns are extracts from <i>Sustaining Progress</i> and should not be amended		These 2 columns should be completed by the Agency when preparing the Action Plan		These 2 columns should be completed by the Agency when preparing each Progress Reports	
1	2	3	4	5	6
Para.	Commitment to Modernisation of the Public Service	Specific Action <i>[Agencies to identify specific actions which they will undertake to achieve the commitments identified in Column 2]</i>	Date <i>[unless stated Agencies to identify dates for achievement of specific actions]</i>	Achieved <i>[Yes - Y No - N]</i>	If not yet achieved or did not meet commitment please provide further details
	eGovernment				
20.19	<p>The parties are committed to the further development of eGovernment on the following basis:</p> <p>(i) facilitating better citizen access and interaction with the public service by realising the potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs);</p> <p>(ii) building collaborative knowledge-based structures focused on serving both citizens and the public service; and</p> <p>(iii) facilitating continuous adaptation and improvement in service delivery by fully utilising ICTs to deliver public services seamlessly and across traditional boundaries.</p>	<p><i>Actions being identified should include the following :</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of specific commitments in 'New Connections' • Any initiatives being taken to facilitate better access and interaction with customers 			

Sustaining Progress : Template for Agencies (Department of the Environment and Local Government)

Name of Agency : _____

These 2 columns are extracts from Sustaining Progress and should not be amended		These 2 columns should be completed by the Agency when preparing the Action Plan		These 2 columns should be completed by the Agency when preparing each of Progress Reports	
1	2	3	4	5	6
Para.	Commitment to Modernisation of the Public Service	Specific Action <i>[Agencies to identify specific actions which they will undertake to achieve the commitments identified in Column 2]</i>	Date <i>[unless stated, Agencies to identify dates for achievement of specific actions]</i>	Achieved <i>[Yes - Y No - N]</i>	If not yet achieved or did not meet commitment d: please provide further details
	Atypical Working Arrangements				
21.8 and 21.9	The work pattern may be such in specific areas that specific work processes can be performed most effectively by part time staff. Situations may arise where the need to respond to temporary pressures may require the employment of temporary staff or outsourcing of work. Unions will be notified in advance of initiatives of this kind.	<i>Actions being identified should include the following :</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atypical working arrangements, such as part-time working, temporary employment or outsourcing. 			
	Attendance Patterns				
21.10	In order to provide a satisfactory level of service to the public, there is a need in certain areas for changes to the standard working day in order to provide services outside the traditional "9 to 5" pattern. The parties are committed to discussions to establish how this can best be achieved, where required.	<i>Actions being identified should include the following :</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atypical attendance patterns 			

Sustaining Progress : Template for Agencies (Department of the Environment and Local Government)

Name of Agency : _____

These 2 columns are extracts from Sustaining Progress and should not be amended		These 2 columns should be completed by the Agency when preparing the Action Plan		These 2 columns should be completed by the Agency when preparing each of Progress Reports	
1	2	3	4	5	6
Para.	Commitment to Modernisation of the Public Service	Specific Action <i>[Agencies to identify specific actions which they will undertake to achieve the commitments identified in Column 2]</i>	Date <i>[unless stated Agencies to identify dates for achievement of specific actions]</i>	Achieved <i>[Yes - Y No - N]</i>	If not yet achieved or did not meet commitment details please provide further details
	Training				
20.20	The parties are committed to continued training and development for all staff	<i>Actions being identified should include the following :</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measures being undertaken to define and address the training and development needs of staff in a coordinated and coherent manner. 			
	Equal Opportunities				
20.21	The public service will continue to build on the significant progress which has been made in regard to policies on equality and diversity in order to promote equal opportunity in all aspects of civil and public service employment.	<i>Actions being identified should include the following :</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of policies/targets on equality and diversity in accordance with integrated strategies on human resource management. 			
	Partnership				
20.9	The parties are committed to building upon the structures that have been established, and to further embedding and refining the process across the public service, in order to deliver real improvements in performance at organisational level, involve staff in the change and modernisation process and improve the working environment.	<i>Actions being identified should include the following :</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvements in the participative structures and processes at local level 			

Note : where the Commitment is not relevant to the agency, reasons should be stated on the table

Sustaining Progress : Template for Agencies (Department of the Environment and Local Government)

Name of Agency : _____

These 2 columns are extracts from Sustaining Progress and should not be amended		These 2 columns should be completed by the Agency when preparing the Action Plan		These 2 columns should be completed by the Agency when preparing each Progress Reports	
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Para.	Commitment to Modernisation of the Public Service	Specific Action <i>(Agencies to identify specific actions which they will undertake to achieve the commitments identified in Column 2)</i>	Date <i>(Unless stated Agencies to identify dates for achievement of specific actions)</i>	Achieved <i>[Yes - Y No - N]</i>	If not yet achieved or did not meet commitment please provide further details
	Performance Verification				
20.25	The parties agree to the establishment of a mechanism to verify that all sectors, organisations and grades in the public service deliver outputs in line with the provisions of this Agreement. This mechanism will be established in accordance with Section 26. Paragraph 26.6 in particular refers.	<i>Actions being identified should include the following :</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agencies must adhere to the procedures set out in Section 26 of Sustaining Progress and the Department's timetable in this regard. 			

APPENDIX 'C'

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interview Schedule
Re: Workplace Partnership Interviews

Interview (1) Union/ Representative	Date: 1.5.2007 at 2.30 pm
Interview (2) Management representative	Date: 1.5.2007 at 4.30 pm
Interview (3) Union Representative	Date: 16.5.2007 at 2.30 pm
Interview (4) Union Representative	Date: 17.5.2007 at 11.30 am
Interview (5) Union/Staff Representative	Date: 17.5.2007 at 2.30 pm
Interview (6) Management Representative	Date: 23.5.2007 at 5.05 pm
Interview (7) Management Representative	Date: 24.5.2007 at 2.30 pm
Interview (8) Union Representative	Date: 24.5.2007 at 4.20 pm
Interview (9) Management Representative	Date: 07.6.2007 at 2.30 pm

APPENDIX 'D'

INTERVIEW GUIDE SAMPLE PAGE USED FOR INTERVIEWS

Q10

What in your experience has been the most significant item on the partnership agenda over the last 3 years?

Q11

Do you think the partnership agenda should be broadened?

Q12

Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the operation of partnership - has it met your expectations ?