

**AN EXAMINATION OF WORKPLACE PARTNERSHIP IN A PUBLIC
SECTOR ORGANISATION DURING THE RECESSION, NAMELY DUBLIN
CITY COUNCIL, WITH RECOMMENDATIONS IN RELATION TO AN
ALTERNATIVE WAY FORWARD FOR PARTNERSHIP**

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I know submit for assessment of the programme of study leading to the award of BA(Honour) 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 my work.

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EXECUTIVE BRIEF

Chapter 1 - Introduction

This chapter has outlined the problem and purpose of the study. It has also gave a brief background and description of the subject

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

In this chapter I will outline the theoretical framework on theories relating to workplace partnership from every perspective. There is some focus on the Irish Government Framework for Workplace Partnership as the research is mainly involving a public sector organisation

Chapter 3 – Practical Methodology

I will present my research process how and why I choose particular methods and how the collection of the empirical data was conducted

Chapter 4 – Empirical Presentation and Analysis

I will present the findings from my empirical study. This is presented and outlined in two separate groups and then analysed altogether to present the empirical date and connect with the theoretical framework

Chapter 5 - Conclusions and Discussions

Present my conclusions and discussions on recommendations

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CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

An examination of Workplace Partnership in a Public Sector Organisation during the recession, namely Dublin City Council, with recommendations in relation to an alternative way forward for Partnership.

Trade Union movement started in Ireland back in the early 20th Century. It has progressed and evolved throughout the years into well-established entities within organisations. They have become embedded into the cultures of organisations and in the Public Sector in particular. In some instances they have proved to be a force to be reckoned with.

Up until 2008 the Country was at its peak with Social Partnership having shaped the way forward for Trade Unions, the Government and the Employers for over twenty years. This situation changed rapidly after the recession hit the country and most of Europe. This saw Ireland go from one extreme to the other, whereby favourable pay and conditions which had been negotiated, agreed and implemented through Social Partnership were almost eliminated overnight, reduced or frozen for the foreseeable future. This brought Social Partnership to a halt and last year it effectively collapsed and existed in name only.

Following on from this a series of decisions was made by the Government that would change the public sector for the worst. In the following months a number of announcements were made in relation to pay cuts in the public sector and were to be applied across every level.

This saw the knock on effect of employees who are trade union members turn to their Trade Unions for advice.

With the breakdown of Social Partnership and pay cuts being applied to public sector employees the trade union movement took industrial action against the Government on behalf of their members. In November 2009 the Trade Unions gave the Government notice of a national day of strike, this took place on 24th November 2009 and saw for the first time since the 1980's most of the Public Sector employees on the picket line. Effectively overnight we had succeeded in going back over 20 years of industrial peace and we were right back to the old industrial relations adversarial ways of the 1970's & 1980's.

The industrial action escalated over a period of time and varied in different public sector organisations from go slows, to work to rule and things seemed to go from bad to worse when the outcome from the industrial action was personified by Irish Passports being delayed and a huge backlog built up.

The outcome of this saw the citizens of Ireland not getting passports when needed and absolute outrage ensued. The trade union movement dominated the Irish tabloids for weeks on end; however the media did not portray the public sector in a positive light. It seemed that no one had any sympathy for employees/management in the Public Sector and this was largely because the Country was in the middle of a recession. Businesses and other organisations were closing down every day. The general perception that public service jobs were secure and there would be no redundancies announced was always out there but because of the timing it was more dominant.

However “in house” it was a very different perspective. With work to rule active in the organisation coupled with pay cuts and not knowing if there would be further cuts, staff morale was low, absenteeism rising and motivation was almost non-existent.

Employees and management were not communicating and the channels that were used for this communication was workplace partnership but this had effectively broken down. As part of the industrial action some trade unions have instructed their officials and members not participate in workplace partnership. Employers need good working relationships with Trade Unions. Workplace Partnership has been the way to do things for the last ten years and now it could very well collapse as Social Partnership did, despite it having been the hope that Workplace Partnership would mirror the good relationships of the social partners which had been achieved at national level.

In April 2010 the Government outlined a four year agreement to be negotiated with Trade Unions in the hope of resolving the dispute that had escalated throughout the public sector. Within this agreement, commonly known as The Croke Park Deal, major changes were outlined for the public sector.

Workplace Partnership would be the most suitable channel to steer the required changes through that process. But relations between the various partners were at an all time low with the core requirement of trust being almost non-existent. However it is imperative that all the parties re-engage with Workplace Partnership because it is both implicit and explicit in the Croke Park Deal that if the necessary changes and savings are not delivered, further pay cuts and job losses will follow.

Partnership was a positive force for ten years. Yet it is the negative tone and threats outlined in the previous paragraph that make it imperative that Partnership be put back on the rails and quickly.

These introductory three pages have set the tone for my Project in terms of the evolution of Partnership. My project will outline where Partnership started, what processes drove it up to pre-recession times and finally where Partnership needs to go in the uncharted waters which prevail in recession-hit Ireland.

CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 History of Industrial Relations in Ireland

The development of industrial relations is inextricably linked to the development of trade unions, which goes back to the eighteenth century. The existing nature of the trade union movement in Ireland has its starting point in the dramatic transformation brought about from the 1800's Industrial Revolution beginning in Britain.

There are many milestones (years) marked throughout Ireland's history that have changed industrial relations dramatically over the years. For example 1946 marked a year of great change in industrial relations in Ireland as this was the year the Labour Court was established through the Industrial Relations Act 1946. The setting up of the Labour Court demonstrated that a more supportive approach to trade unions on the part of the Irish State.

Another major era was 1970 to 1982 this saw the implementation of the National Wage Agreement. This involved agreements between trade unions and employers on pay and employment conditions which, once agreed applied across the board. The growth of Multi National Companies, particularly US Companies operating in Ireland at this time, the Irish industrial relations structure symbolized something of a new understanding. Many Multi National Companies had a clear preference for non-union status (Murray 1984). Some organisations were not happy with dealing with a number of unions representing different groups of workers.

1980 saw employment density reach a record level of sixty-two per cent. By 1987 employment density had fallen by 5%, the reason for this was economic recession.

Industrial relations in Ireland as outlined above stems from the UK Model in which it is based on an adversarial & voluntary system which means there is no state intervention in collective employee relations and there is also no legally imposed structures in place. Ireland and UK are not the only countries to have a voluntary system of industrial relations the US, Canada, New Zealand & Australian also share this system.

Teague (2005) believe the Irish system of industrial relations is not at all voluntary and has become even less voluntary with the extension of individual rights, voluntary collective bargaining and union membership numbers dropping over time. However Roche (2005) outlines it has also been debated that employer, employee and trade unions have enjoyed the freedom within the law, which to some extent allows them to choose their own employee relations model in which they want to operate.

The 1980's saw a number of factors combine to create a very difficult environment for the government, employers, trade unions and in deed the people of Ireland. This resulted in the need for Social Partnership to be introduced.

2.2 The Birth of Social Partnership

In 1987, the Government, Employers, Trade Union's and Community & Voluntary Bodies got together and developed a centralised bargaining system in which they negotiated a national level pay and social welfare system. Following on from this agreement there were five more three – year pacts that were agreed: -

<u>Partnership Agreements</u>	<u>Duration</u>
• Programme for National Recovery	1987 – 1990
• Programme for Economic & Social Progress	1990 – 1993
• Programme for Competitiveness & Work	1994 – 1996
• Partnership 2000	1997 – 2000
• Programme for Prosperity & Fairness (PDF)	2000 - 2003
• Sustaining Progress	2003 – 2005
• Towards 2016	2006 to date

Mc Kersie cited that the “National Social Partnership” Model has been identified by international scholars as a key contributing factor in Ireland's economic and employment growth in the years since 1990. However the Social Partners came under fire in the 1990's, as there were some worries that the Social Partnership was focused on National Levels and not on Industry/Workplace Level. The outcome of this was the introduction of “Partnership 2000”.

2.3 Partnership 2000

In 1999 The Social Partners agreed and introduced “Partnership 2000”, this was a three-year plan following on from previous agreements. This plan included the introduction of Partnership at Enterprise Level in Ireland. Within this agreement the Social Partners defined Workplace Partnership as follows:-

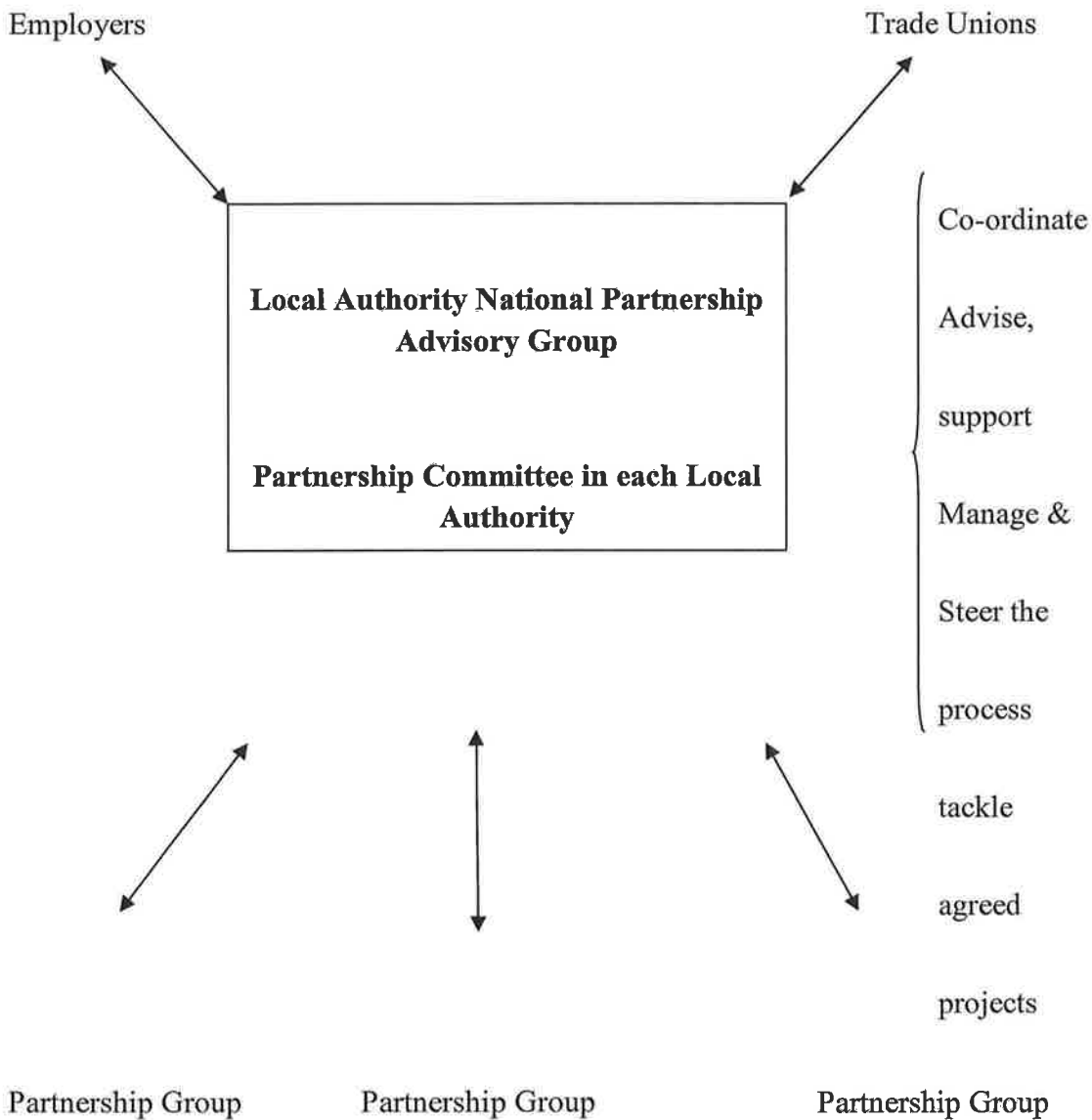
“Partnership is an active relationship based on recognition of a common interest to secure the competitiveness, viability and prosperity of the enterprise. It involves a continuing commitment by employees to improvements in quality and efficiency; and the acceptance by employers of employees as stakeholders 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.” (Partnership 2000)

John O’Dowd (2009) outlined that an important feature of Partnership 2000 this is that the Social Partners were deliberately being vague as to allow organisations to adopt partnership into their organisations in the way they see best through their own systems of Industrial Relations. An important aspect also in the definition is that it does not state that a trade union is necessarily needed to adopt a partnership model into any organisation. In other words Partnership is for both non-union and unionised organisations.

In 1999 “A framework for “Partnership” within Ireland’s local authority system, based on a three-tier structure, was established by management and trade unions. This initiative draws on the partnership principles laid down in Partnership 2000.

2.4 Partnership in Local Government

“A National Framework for Local Authorities” (1999)



Outlined in the above diagram is what partnership aimed to achieve at a local level and have the sort of relationship that was achieved at national level. It was hoped that this would modernise and introduce more customer friendly services at local level.

The Local Authority National Partnership Advisory Group membership is made up of employer body, the Local Government Management Services Board and the Trade Unions.

In the framework for local authorities the following is outlined:-

- A lot more consultation with staff and their representatives about big decisions affecting them
- Pay and conditions and change decisions are made by management and trade union through the industrial relations arena
- Managers at different levels make decisions on a day to day basis
- Workplace Partnership Committees and Groups will allow managers, union representatives and staff to contribute to decision making
- Public will receive a better service, quality of service and the quality of working life of managers and staff. Staff will have a bigger say in what happens in the organisation
- Managers will have support on making decision on issues that in the past they would have had to consider and make on their own. A better understanding of the need for change
- Unions should be a greater say for their members in decision – making and more time for union representatives to concentrate on “bread and butter” issues

rather than dealing with the fallout from poor communications and lack of involvement.

Chapter 10 (p.56) of Partnership 2000 states that successful change “must be based on a partnership approach where the objective is to achieve joint ownership by management, trade unions and staff and to replace the adversarial approach to change with an open cooperative process based on effective consultation and participation by all concerned for the progression and implementation of strategic goals, service delivery objectives, and associated action programmes”.

John O’Dowd (2009) outlines that one important aspect of most partnership processes is separating the collective bargaining and the normal industrial relation agenda feature from the new systems. The reason for this is because collective bargaining deals with issues of conflict, pay rates of principles of advancement such as seniority. Partnership more focuses on some common set of objectives. The involvement of employees and line managers who are not representatives has more scope in the partnership process. The agenda’s for partnership are more focused on operational improvement and development and tend to stay away from the industrial relation arena.

Walton & McKersies Behavioural Theory of Labour Negotiations (1965) identifies four main elements within collective bargaining.

- Distributive Bargaining
- Integrative bargaining,
- Attitudinal structuring
- Intra-organisational bargaining.

According to the authors, each has its own function for the interacting parties, its own internal logic, and its own identifiable set of instrumental acts or tactics. Attitudinal Structuring is the process through which the parties, whether intentionally or not, seek to influence the attitudes of their own side towards the other. This is domain of “trust”, “respect”, “arms length” and other characteristics of the employer-union relationship.

2.5 EU Directive on Consultation & Information

The Employees (Provision of Information & Consultation) Act 2006 transposed the 2002 EU Directive into Irish Law. John O’Dowd (2009) outlines that under this directive Employers are liable to inform employees (of 50 or more) on certain decisions that are made by the organisation that will affect the employee’s employment e.g. threat to employment, decisions that could lead to substantial changes in work organisation or in contractual relations.

Employers can voluntarily propose information and consultation mechanisms to their employees and/or their representatives. Employees must agree to the form of information and consultation that management have put forward to them whether it’s mixed, direct or

representative forms. There is a trigger attached to this legislation whereby employees or employees must trigger it or else it does not come into affect. Trade Unions are not the only from of representatives under this legislation employees themselves can elect or indeed if they want to be directly involved can put themselves forward.

According to O’Dowd (1998) the above is an important component of partnership.

Partnership however is not the only form of employee participation. O’Dowd (1998) outlines there are many different types of Employee Involvement. These include direct forms, mixed forms & indirect or representative forms.

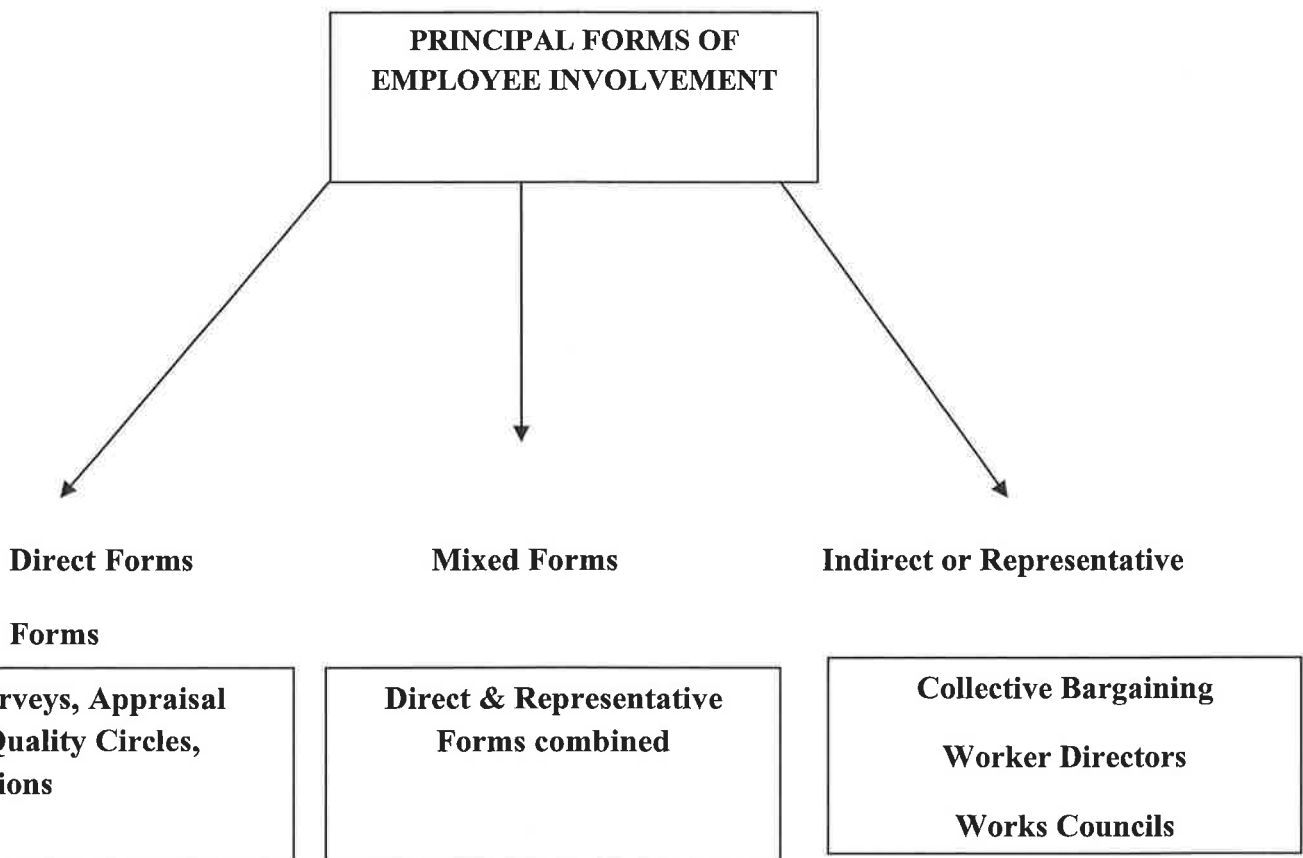


Figure 2.1: Direct & Representative Employee Involvement of (2009 p.11)

2.6 Forms of Employee Participation

Direct Forms

This form of participation relates to employees directly involved through Teams, Appraisal Systems, Quality Circles and Share Options. This allows the employees to be more involved and have more power over decision – making and can also assist with problem – solving.

According to O’Dowd (2009) there are two broad forms of direct participation these are:-

Consultative and Delegative = they can involve groups and employees and also individuals employees

Individual Consultative Form

Management hold the right to carry out or not any suggestions made by individuals e.g. staff attitudes surveys and systematic suggestion schemes.

Indirect or Representative

This is where employees use union representative/shop stewards to represent them on issues that they see important to their employment. O’Dowd (1998) cites that the most common forms of indirect involvement is Collective Bargaining also Worker Directors & Joint – Union – Management Bodies. The difference between the above and the Partnership Model 2000 is some believe that the early initiatives more focused on direct forms of involvement, however partnership clearly referred to both representative and direct forms.

Roche & Geary (2006) outline that Partnership 2000 was different in that what had been discussed in earlier times, the design and operation of partnership systems included involvement of Trade Unions in this new concept.

2.7 Remuneration System

Remuneration systems are another form of employee involvement and this normally includes profit sharing, share ownership, group bonus schemes and merit/performance – related pay.

Profit Sharing Schemes

Employees can as well as employers gain on profits from the organisation. The profits the organisation makes are shared with the workforce. These are in addition to their fixed salary/wage.

Employee Share Option Scheme

The organisation shares are set-aside for employees. John O’Dowd (2004) outlines Employee Share Ownership Plan which provide for shares being “warehoused” on behalf of employees in a specialty create trust.

Merit/Performance Related Pay

These relate to the performance of an individual/group and link to financial reward.

O'Dowd (2009) cites that Financial Participation no doubt can be structured in a "mutual gains" manner and that it can support the kind of constructive partnership that seek to go beyond "them and us" thinking within the organisation.

Remuneration Systems in Ireland would mostly be used in private sector organisations the mostly commonly one that would be used in the public section would be Performance Related Pay and this would used at senior management level.

2.8 Models of Partnership

Kochan & Osterman Mutual Gains Approach

This is based on a set of collective principles controlling the organisation of work and the management of employees. These principles and practices can be set down in unionised and non-unionised organisations.

General Principles of Mutual Gains Enterprise

Strategic Level

- Supportive business strategies
- Top management commitment
- Effective voice for human resources in strategy making and governance

Functional (Human Resource Policy) Level

- Staffing based on Employment stabilization
- Investment in training and development
- Contingent compensation that reinforces co operation, participation & contribution

Workplace Level

- High standards of employee selection
- Broad task design and teamwork
- Employee involvement in problem solving
- Climate of co operation and trust

(Kochan & Osterman 1994, p.46)

As outlined above this model is focussed on employee relations based on human resource & industrial relations policies and practices. They state all stakeholders gain from these, hence mutual gains.

Guinnigle (1997) offers three broad categories. These are:-

Strategic Partnership

This type of partnership arrangement involves trade unions in strategic decision-making as well as in operational decisions at the level of the workplace

Operational Union – Management Partnership

This focuses on union acceptance of change in work practices and in return for active participation in operational management decisions involving workplace change. This is similar to Roche and Turners “joint decision-making” model.

Operational Employee-Management Partnership

Managers involve employees directly in operational management but not in strategic decision making and not through trade union representatives. This form is found in some non-union firms.

According to O'Dowd (1998) the use of Partnership as an approach to change varies considerably between operational and strategic issues.

- Operational issues include the introduction of new plant and technology
- Strategic issues include introduction of new products, setting business targets and formulation of plans with respect to mergers etc.

Oxenbridge & Brown (2002) place partnership into two different groups these are:-

- 1) Robust/Nurturing is seen as a better channel of delivering mutual gains
- 2) Shallow/Containing forms as the high union density and to involved "informal" partnership actions.

In the shallow/containing forms of partnership, trade unions don't have much influence and issue that are important to them and their members like pay and conditions are relatively slim. Employers obviously would gain most from these types of arrangements.

2.9 Theorists & Different Aspects

John O'Dowd (2006) conducted a survey of all known cases of partnership involving Trade Unions in Ireland. The survey was conducted with managers involved in workplace partnership who were knowledgeable in respect to the operations and effects of partnership processes that they were involved in. The outcome of this survey was positive aspects to the organisation and all parties involved. Outcomes for trade unions according to the managers included higher levels of union involvement had occurred on day-to-day basis as consequence of partnership and three quarters associated partnership with higher levels of influence on management decision making. Most of the managers outlined positive effects in relation to levels of trust, quality of communications and the incidence of disputes and industrial relation grievances.

There was a view that partnership was associated with positive aspects for the employees included higher levels of job satisfaction and better pay and conditions. Less than half attributed higher job security to partnership and less than one in five reported a positive association between partnership and staffing levels.

O'Dowd (2006) concluded that the most positive outcomes of this survey were registered in the areas favourable to employers.

Roche's survey (2009) is similar to that of John O'Dowd study as it also outlines that mutual gains are associated with partnership he notes employers, employees and trade unions all gain

from the process in various ways. His study was data gathered from a large representative sample of employees in Ireland. From the data collected he cites employees gain with respect to intrinsic aspects of work such as job satisfaction and fairness in the workplace, work autonomy and information preparation.

The gains for employers with respect to organisational commitment, quality of managerial/supervisory relations and the climate of employee relations. Roche (2009) outlines while partnership may be a double-edged sword for trade unions, positive net gains appear to arise with respect to union commitment, union influence and the likelihood of union membership. Arguably these findings do not point to any major asymmetry with respect to the balance of mutuality or advantage in partnership arrangements. There were no gains found in relation to employment security.

John Kelly's (1999, 2004) assessment of partnership in UK companies concludes differently to O'Dowd's & Roche's research. Kelly outlines that in practice the balance of advantage in partnership arrangements generally favours employers to a very significant degree. He found that trade unions either accept and agree to partnership or suffer de-recognition or the closure of unionised facilities. The employer initiated arrangements in a largely coercive manner.

His study of 22 partnership agreements found that levels of union influence on company decision – making was sparse and seem to rule out safe generalisation, but evidence was found that the workplace representative's influence had declined in some cases. The rate of

job losses was higher in partnership companies that matched in non-partnership companies.

With exception of a few cases Kelly outlined that unions and their members had gained little from partnership in terms of employment security, wage rises, influence on organisation.

Kelly terms identifies that partnership is at one end “Employer – dominant” at the other end “Labour-parity” arrangements.

Employer-dominant arrangements are focused on power favourable to employers, partnership agendas reflecting employer’s interests and emphasis on union compliance.

Labour – Parity arrangements arise where power is more equally balanced, unions are well organised, partnership agendas reflect the interests of both parties and employers are dependent on labour co-operation.

These types of partnerships are expected to lead to different outcomes: Employer-Dominant arrangements favour employer outcomes and Labour – Parity arrangements delivering mutual gains.

Knell’s study (1999) on Partnership outlines mutuality within workplace partnership, open management and stress the issue of involvement. This sets out “core set of values” that represents partnership and includes trust and honesty, creating a common vision by all

involved, multi-facet employee voice mechanisms and employment security. Knell's concluded after extensive studies of 15 UK Companies that through the introduction of workplace partnership mutual gains were visible and realised. Like O'Dowd and Roche's studies this has similar gains for employees and employers with higher turnover and profits, higher levels of work satisfaction. However, during this study lower absenteeism was identified and confidence on the part of employees in the development potential of their jobs and higher levels of employment security.

2.10 Other Studies

The following writers have also carried out studies on partnership and have contributed to the schools of thoughts.

Walton (1985) study on partnership concentrates on the commitment aspect. This is characterised by a series of principles and practices. The employment of security of staff is addressed through "employment assurances policies" and this sought to maximise this through the use of profit and gain sharing. It includes job design policies, compensation policies that strengthen group efforts. Employees and Trade Unions received consultation through voice systems and also intensive information arrangements. Trade unions and management relations were given co-operation in the expectation to future joint problem solving and joint planning.

Guest & Peccei (1998; 2001) study takes the view of partnership as a bundle of principles and beliefs and attitudes and practices. The focus is on the mutuality factor. The principles of the

partnership include treating employees fairly now and in the future and the right to independent representation. The beliefs and attitudes aspect involves the role of trade unions and accepting the role and the enthusiasm to accommodate the interest of all stakeholders in the day to day running of the organisation and sharing business information with all stakeholders. Practices include job design policies and reward policies that build up group effort.

However, Acker's & Paynes (1998) are different in that it focuses on the union aspect of partnership relationship and the gains for Trade Unions. Workplace partnership is more seen as a way for trade unions to achieve bureaucratic centrality in employment. They perceive workplace partnership as a means for the unions to regain initiative and work to rebuild their institutional presence.

Kochan's backed their model of gains for stakeholders by outlining the gains especially for employer and employees. The employee's gains included higher levels of employment security more job satisfaction, for the employer it was higher productivity, lower costs and higher quality. With this partnership it gave the opportunity for trade unions input into decision making from which traditionally they had been debarred in the US.

Roche & Geary (2002) have noted that the literature on partnership is conflicting between two different angles. One where critics look upon partnership as a new means for extending union

influence and the other whereby those who criticise partnership as a way for management to weaken trade unions.

2.11 TUC & Involvement & Participation Association Model

TUC & IPA Model on Partnership relates specifically to six key elements used to implement a successful partnership with any organisation.

The six elements are:

1. A joint commitment to the success of the enterprise;
2. Mutual recognition of the legitimate interests of each constituency: management, employees and trade unions (where present);
3. A mutual commitment and effort to develop and sustain good working relationships, characterised by high levels of trust
4. Structures and practices that allow for information sharing and joint problem solving between the workforce and management at all levels of the organisation;
5. Policies and practices to address the balance needed between flexible work practices and employment security; and
6. Policies and practices to share the success of the organisation

Marchington (1998) believes 1-3 is organisation values and for these to be used as guiding principles for management involved in employment relations. He outlines that all involved should endorse these principles. He also notes to sustain partnership within the organisation

that 1-3 are not only endorsed but it is how these principles will be implemented in the different groups of interests and for non union forms the second element in particular.

One major aspect as outlined above of partnership is the ability to continuously joint problem solve, share information openly on any decisions that have an effect on employees working life. Elements 5-6 outline employment security and the delivery of mutually acceptable gains for all parties. The IPA cites the structure and content of these arrangements is expected to involve permanent “employee voice mechanisms” at the local and strategic levels, through which employees views are sought and if necessary acted upon, before the decision is taken”.

The above arrangements can take direct consultative and indirect representational forms. The TUC & IPA Model’s vital quality is that employee’s input into decision-making is freely done and not pushed on by management.

This model describes employment security as “A stable employment framework” provided through, for example a multi-year pay deal and/or a no-compulsory redundancy guarantee, complemented with careful joint management of unavoidable job losses, including policies for redeployment, retraining and job search support.

For the IPA element six does not just include profit sharing, gain sharing bonuses but also an organisational – wide celebration of improving performance, staff “perks” and harmonised

terms and conditions. The benefits are more focused on personal development and quality of working life. In this model financial reward is not addressed.

The above six elements do not state that union representations are essential to a successful partnership as is the same with the Irish Partnership 2000 agreement. Indeed if a non-unionised organisation were to take a partnership approach to the implementation of change going forward it would be just as successful as a unionised organisation.

Coupar (1999) outlines two elements from the six above that seem to be important to this one:- firstly that the employee voice is adequately and free facilitated at all levels such that employees enjoy significant influence over organisational decision-making and secondly, that these joint-problem solving process delivery regular, substantial benefits to both the management team and the workforce.

It has been argued that if one considers the relationship in workplace partnership to be that of the management team of the organisation and the employees and that it allows for employees input into decision – making and other areas of involvement like works councils and staff forums, as this is the case in much of continental Europe.

These areas would normally be covered by trade unions in unionised companies, but if employees gain that flexibility then non-union forms exist. Dietz, Cullen and Coad, outline in

their in depth study of non-unionised organisation with partnerships in place that indeed partnership can in fact be successful without a trade union present.

IRS (2000) researchers have suggested that non-union forms of partnership are often “more developed” and “deeper rooted”. Knell (1999) found insignificant differences between non-unionised and union in his cases for the D.T.I.

However Robert Carton (2001) outlines that the initiative for change came from the trade unions. He cites that for employer and trade unions to embrace partnership they first need to change behaviours. By creating the right atmosphere for a very different way of working together then much more can be gained. He outlines that instead of the conflict driven process for dealing with industrial relations differences between representatives, employees and employers, a partnership approach to the nature of that relationship should be taken by both parties. The new relationship is about a new wave of trust and commitment. The ability of the leader to gain commitment from participants to the new approach and get them to continue to see the value of partnership is not to be underestimated. To get buy in from staff below them the leader’s role heading up the change is extremely vital to gain this.

Commitment from outside the partnership circle needs to be gained. All parties must be able to delivery on partnership.

Workplace Partnership has been a relatively new concept in Ireland. There are different opinions and many theories on Partnership at enterprise level, some believe that within partnership there are mutual gains for all stakeholders involved, however some studies have outlined that management gain more so than any other parties involved and reckon that the Trade Unions and their members gain very little if any at all from the partnership relationship.

Another aspect of the literature is that partnership agenda tend to be operational and not strategically focused most of the time. Looking at different partnership models one major principle of partnership is high levels of trust that must take place within the new partnership relationship. For most public sector partnerships it's about removing the old adversarial style of dealing with change and replacing it with new behaviours including respect, trust and mutual gains for all involved.

CHAPTER THREE – RESEARCH QUESTION

3.1 The Research Question:

An examination of Workplace Partnership in a Public Sector Organisation during the recession, namely Dublin City Council, with recommendations in relation to an alternative way forward for Partnership

The reason for choosing my topic is that the breakdown of social partnership several months ago is now having an effect on my organisation. It has effected my organisation in terms of trade unions and management are now in dispute about the pay and conditions of employees and has lead to a work to rule and the possibility that workplace partnership may be abandoned altogether. I am interested in finding a solution to this problem.

The questions I want to get the answers to are:-

- I want to investigate the views of all parties involved in Workplace Partnership – Management, Employees & Trade Unions in the context of what they think of the partnership process and where do they see it going in the future
- I also want to examine employees not involved in the Workplace Partnership process to get their views on what they think about Workplace Partnership and how much they know about the process
- I want to investigate what has been achieved since the introduction of workplace partnership policies, and the implemented change initiatives on operational issues

- Examine the “Employee Voice Mechanism” and non-union partnership theories in more depth
- I will investigate Dublin City Council’s Senior Management’s perspective on Workplace Partnership in relation to an alternative partnership going forward
- I want to find out if Workplace Partnership has been successful within Dublin City Council and if so what can be the alternative if the process is broken

CHAPTER FOUR - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to examine Workplace Partnership in a Public Sector Organisation in a recession, to gain the knowledge, ideas and expertises of Senior Management, Trade Union Officials and Employees.

4.1 Research Method

“A research method is simply a technique for collecting data. It can involve a specific instrument, such as a self-completion questionnaire or a structured interview schedule, or participant observation, whereby the researcher listens to and watches others.” (Bryman & Bell 2007, p.40)

4.2 Qualitative or Quantitative Method

Qualitative Research is collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data by observing what people do and say. Whereas, quantitative research refers to counts and measures of things, qualitative research refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things. {Internet}

As Workplace Partnership in Local Authorities in Ireland is a relatively new concept the qualitative method is more suited to this type of research. It quite often focuses on and displays characteristics like exploratory in nature and uses natural, existing settings and contexts.

Gubrim & Holstein (1997) suggest four traditions of qualitative research, Naturalism, Ethno-methodology, Emotionalism and Postmodernism.

For the purpose of researching data for this subject it was relevant to do qualitative rather than a quantitative method of research as this dissertation is focusing on Workplace Partnership in a Public Sector Organisation in a recession and it will more focus on the ideas; knowledge and expertises of Senior Managers, Trade Union Officials and Employees and this information would be better communicated through interviews rather than questionnaires.

4.3 Sampling

Purposeful sampling was used in this study, as it's a non-probability method by which the selected cases are related to this study. This identifies the people who have the answers to the questions formed for interviews. A Group interview was considered but because of the current industrial relations issues it was thought that maybe the group would feel awkward and uncomfortable discussing certain aspects of the subject. Questionnaires was also considered but from meeting with the Facilitators of the Partnership Group and discussing various aspects of the study it was decided to have interviews and a focus group/group interviews with various members of the Partnership Group.

“A focus group, sometimes called a focus group interview, is a group interview that focuses clearly upon a particular issue, product, service or topic and encompasses the need for interactive discussions amongst participants” (Carson et al, 2001)

4.4 Data Processing

At first it was hoped that some of the respondents (if any) would agree to a focus group/group interview. If yes then this was to be held on the day of the monthly partnership group meeting before or after the meeting took place and it was hoped that this would persuade the members to participate as it would mean that they would already be there at the meeting and this wouldn't feel much like taking up their time.

Participants are normally chosen using non-probability samplings, often with a specific purpose in mind. For many group interviews this is because you feel that you can learn a great deal from these individuals. Kruegar and Casey (2000:25) refer to such participants as being 'information rich'. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2007, p 337)

"An interview is a purposeful discussion between two or more people" (Kahn and Connell, 1957, p 310)

Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2007, p 315) state that where it is necessary for you to understand the reasons for the decisions that your research participants have taken, or to understand the reasons for their attitudes and opinions, it will be necessary for you to conduct a qualitative interview.

4.5 Types of interviews

Interviews can be broken down into a category of three different types

Structured interviews - use questionnaires based on a predetermined and standardised or identical set of questions.

Semi –structured interviews – the researcher will have a list of themes and questions to be covered, although these may vary from interview to interview.

Unstructured or in-depth interviews – are informal, these would be used to explore in depth a general area in which you are interested.

Semi structured interviews were used to conduct research on this subject as it allowed for the order of questions to vary during interviews, also with these type of interviews it allowed for additional questions to be required. As for example Senior Management being interviewed and the Trade Union Official being interviewed the need for flexibility in changing / rearranging questions in interviews was necessary and the semi-structured interviews allows for this. The openness of semi-structured interviews also allowed for some questions to be dropped or added if necessary, as it was the case that some questions were answered in the previous questions throughout interviewing. These type interviews provide an opportunity to “probe” answers, where if it’s needed for interviewees to explain, or build on their responses. This means that the interviewees have more freedom to speak from their personal experience.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted, each interview was audio taped and transcribed (see appendix 1). Each interview lasted 15-20 minutes approximately.

A combination of open questions and probing questions was used in each interview. The probing questions were used to explore responses that are of significance to the research topic. The use of open questions was used as this allowed for interviewees to describe a particular situation or event. An open question was used at the beginning of the interview this was to invite the interviewee to talk expansively rather than to deliver a monosyllabic response.

“An open question is designed to encourage the interviewee to provide an extensive and developmental answer, and may be used to reveal attitudes or obtain facts” (Grummit, 1980, p. 329).

4.6 Interviews

Four interviews were held in total with Senior Managers and Trade Union Officials three of whom are members of the Corporate Partnership Forum Group of the Organisation. Four interviews contained 20 questions were conducted with the four participants.

The questions were divided up into three sections:

1. Relationship change between parties, levels of trust, achieved objectives and sustaining partnership
2. Delivery of mutual gains, who gains, what benefits does it bring
3. Partnership model, agenda's of partnership, achievements through partnership and current industrial relations dispute and going forward

According to Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2007, p316) they have found that Manager's are more likely to agree to be interviewed, rather than complete a questionnaire, especially where the topic is seen to be interesting and relevant to their current work. An interview provides them with an opportunity to reflect on events without needing to write anything down.

Other researchers report similar conclusions, where participants prefer to be interviewed rather than fill in a questionnaire (North et al. 1983, cited in the Healey, 1991).

The Corporate Partnership Forum Group consists of 34 members. These are a mix of Management and full time & part time Trade Union Officials. After researching the literature containing primary data it was decided that in order to gather the participant's perceptions, opinions, ideas and understanding of the topic it would be better gained through a qualitative method. Initially it was considered to do questionnaires on all members of the Corporate Partnership Forum and as the group consists of 34 members it was thought that this would give a wide range of information, ideas and opinions from all the different members. After meeting with the Facilitator of the group and discussing the questionnaire option it was agreed that interviews would be the best option for gathering data. The current industrial relations dispute in the Public Sector meant that not all Trade Unions are participating in the partnership process so that was a reason to do qualitative methods as it would be difficult to get all perspectives from all individuals on the topic to participate.

After many discussions with the Partnership Facilitator it was decided to email the Group as a whole and outline what was needed in terms of interview participants. This was done so as to

give the participants an option to voluntarily put themselves forward for interview. The Facilitator sent this email to all members of the group. Two Managers came back straight away and put themselves forward for interview. One member of a Trade Union came back and outlined that their particular trade union are not participating in the Partnership process due to the current industrial relations dispute and on that basis did not want to be contacted again. After this it was decided that individual emails would be better sent out to trade union officials that are still participating in partnership. After emailing three Trade Union Officials one came back and was willing to be interviewed. One email was deleted without reading (after two weeks) and one email was read and no reply was received.

On the day of conducting two interviews and attending the partnership monthly meeting it was hoped by meeting Trade Union Officials and being introduced to them formally that maybe someone would come forward for interview, this did not happen. After further discussions with the Facilitator about the difficulty of getting a Trade Union Official to participate for an interview it was decided to email again. When no reply was received it was discussed and decided to approach a trade union representative that was not directly involved in partnership to ask for assistance. This representative emailed and rang an individual that works in a particular trade union office. This got the ball rolling and a set of questions was emailed for the attention of the Trade Union Official's attention. No contact was received back after the email was sent.

It was decided after this effort to use management to assist with getting an interview with a Trade Union Official, finally after many attempts an interview took place with this individual.

One draw back to this was that the Trade Union Official although active within a trade union was not directly part of the partnership group.

After experiencing difficulty in getting individuals to commit to an interview it was decided that email interviews would take place with employees. The reasoning behind this was that the individuals could answer the questions in their own time and would not feel uncomfortable which they might feel in a face to face interview and also because the current industrial relation dispute was at a very important and critical stage that they might not want to participate if it was a face to face interview.

An interview with nine questions was drafted for employees; this was given to a senior manager for comments and adjustments if necessary. Once it was ready for distribution the next stage was selecting employees for interviewing.

Snowball sampling was used for this part of the research. A personal contact was used to gather different participants the reason for this also was the perspective of trade union members and non-unions employees would be applicable as it would be different sides of partnership process (if any). Once enough participants agreed it was time to do interviews. All interviewees again were sent questions and covering email outlined that if they didn't feel comfortable or just didn't want to answer any question this was perfectly acceptable. It was also outlined that all data would remain strictly confidential. Most respondents came back within a two-day period.

Email interviews were found to be good as it did not require transcribing but the downfall to this is the lack of face to face communications and observing the interviewee, facial expressions etc.

Blumberg et al (2005:92) define ethics as the *“moral principles, norms or standards of behaviour that guide moral choices about our behaviour and our relationships with others”*.

All participants that were interviewed were notified from the beginning that all interviews would be strictly confidential. This is extremely important as Senior Managers and Trade Unions Officials were given their opinions, ideas and knowledge to a particular subject, which could be seen as a “delicate subject” and especially now with the current industrial relations dispute in the public sector. All interview guides and questions were emailed in advance to each respondent to give them the option to look over questions and if necessary the respondent was given the option to amend or delete any questions that they did not feel comfortable answering. All interviews were recorded with a tape recording as this way it gains the grasp of the interview and allows for the interviewer to pay more attention to the participant. An important aspect to conducting interviews is to consider the location of the interview itself. All interviews took place in the participant’s workplace, this was to ensure they felt comfortable during the interviews and this in turn can make them more open when answering questions. When analysing and reporting the data you must be extremely careful of the way in which it is analysed and take into account the effects the data could have on all participants that you don’t embarrass, stress, discomfort, pain or harm anyone.

As some of the interviews were tape-recorded and had to be transcribed this can be very time consuming and as this part of the dissertation can be outsourced it was possible to look at this as an option. There were two options available one was to outsource this to a professional outsourcing transcription service or alternatively get a family member or friend to assist with the transcribing. When completing a Management Research Report last year it was extremely helpful to have a friend and work colleague with the skill and equipment to assist with transcribing. After weighing up the pro's and con's of outsourcing the data it was decided to go with the friend rather than send it out to a private company. Two reasons for this 1) it was cheaper and 2) which is extremely important is that the data was to be kept strictly confidential and so this was best kept in house.

4.7 Confidentiality & Anonymity

Once confidentiality and Anonymity are given it is very important to make sure these are maintained. Easterby-Smith et al (2002) raise the important point that, in an interview-based approach to primary data collection, points of significance will emerge as the research progresses, and this will probably lead you to wish to explore these with other participants. However, Easterby-Smith et al, recognise that where you do this within an organisation it may lead to participants indirectly identifying which person was responsible for making the point that you wish to explore with them.

The subject title was discussed from the start with a Senior Manager before doing any research on the topic. This was done for two reasons firstly as the organisation was at present

in the middle of industrial action it was thought that this would be a “delicate subject” to research. Secondly it was to gain permission to use the organisation for this study.

All participants who took place in interviews/discussions were given the following detail:-

The title of the study, the purpose of the study, why they were selected for this study, the length of time needed from them, a list of questions before the interviews took place and the option for them to delete/change some questions if needed, consent that interviews could be tape-recorded, feedback from the study and the assurances that all data would be kept strictly private and confidential.

When transcribing the data it was necessary to include a third party to assist. The participants that were tape-recorded were contacted and they were asked if they would have a problem with a third party assist with transcribing the data. This was to ensure that confidentiality was kept as stated from the beginning.

Secondary Data was also collected from a range of case studies, journals, articles, surveys and publications for the purpose of this research.

CHAPTER FIVE – ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This chapter will outline the findings from the primary data with the hope of answering the research question.

There were 11 key responses out of 20 questions (see appendix 1) that were asked from the interviews with Trade Union Officials and Management who are members of the Corporate Partnership Forum Group in the organisation. From the interviews with employees in the organisation there were 9 key responses from 9 questions.

The findings will be broken down as follows:-

- 1) Management and Trade Union Officials interviews – 3 Sections**
- 2) Employees interviews – 3 Sections**
- 3) Conclusions on interviews**

5.1 Management Interviews & Trade Union Officials

Section 1

- a) Change in the relationship from old style adversarial to a new more open relationship
- b) High levels of trust affected
- c) Objective from the A Framework for Partnership in Local Authorities
- d) Sustaining and embedding partnership in organisations culture

Section 2

- a) Delivery of mutual gains
- b) Who ultimately gains from partnership
- c) What benefits does partnership bring to the organisation

Section 3

- a) Partnership Model is it successful
- b) Agenda's of partnership strategic/operational
- c) Achievements through partnership
- d) Current industrial relations dispute and going forward

Section 1 (a)

Question: The idea behind Partnership was to remove the old style adversarial industrial relations approach to change and replace it with a more open, informative relationship between Employers, Trade Unions and Employees.

In your opinion do you think this has been achieved? Or is the old style still active under the cover of Partnership?

Manager (1) answered this with a “yes and no”.

Manager (1) outlined that management and trade union officials both know each other a lot more now than before partnership existed in the organisation. It’s all about getting things done through people so if you haven’t got the relationships with people then immediately you’re operating and negotiating in a vacuum or maybe even an adversarial vacuum so those relationships have been very fruitful to avoid difficulties in the organisation. Looking back on the industrial relations manner in which the organisation conducted their business there were no real strikes over the last 10 years. A lot of that can be contributed to being able to sit down and negotiate with the trade union officials.

On the no side of that I think that under the cover there is a bit of the old style still there and we saw that very clearly in the current industrial dispute where some of the unions withdrew from partnership. The Trade Unions could have still maintained a particular stance because partnership is there for the rough and the smooth times. The tendency for the trade unions to withdraw from partnership at the first difficulty, even though it is a major difficulty, they should have worked their way through it and still respected their

position. The old style adversarial approach is not as prominent but there are elements of it still and it might take another 5 years to root that out.

Manager (2) believes that the change has been achieved in some areas; an example of this is the Water Services Department. A definite change has taken place there which has resulted in management not making decisions without consulting employees and trade union officials first.

Trade Union Official (1) outlined that partnership took away the adversarial approach that was there whereby now with the partnership process, the trade unions are engaging with management as before they were negotiating/arguing across a table and this was the significant difference.

Trade Union Official (2) stated that the adversarial approach has largely disappeared. But there are obvious areas like Waste Management, Waterworks & Main Drainage where adversarial situations still prevail largely related to the implementation of modern change over long-standing and hard won agreements. This is quite understandable and poses a bigger problem for trade unions who want to preserve jobs and recognise the threat to jobs from cheaper, private contractors. But getting members to see this is very difficult.

Section 1 (b)

Question 2: High levels of trust are outlined in all literature on Partnership as being a key element to the success of a Partnership. Do you think the current Industrial Relations Dispute will affect the trust built up between Management and Trade Unions?

Manager (1) believed that the level of trust would not be affected due to the current Industrial Relations Dispute. The reason for that is management have a certain maturity about relationships and how they deal with trade unions and people.

Manager (2) believes that at a national level there will be some affect but at a local level the trust would be retained.

Trade Union Official (1) stated that partnership was working well in on both the corporate and on the national level until the recession hit. When decisions had to be made at national level these fed down to corporate level and these decisions were just carried out with no discussions. This seemed just wrong as what was the point of the last 10 years, setting up a Framework for Local Authority Partnership when it was just going to end up with nobody communicating with each other.

Trade Union Official (2) believe that the trust was broken by Government particularly by signing a national wage agreement and then reneging on it before the ink was dry by imposing pay cuts etc. That trust will be very difficult to rebuild but it must happen.

The industrial relations dispute will not affect “local” trust because local management were not to blame for the dispute and they had suffered savage pay cuts themselves.

Section 1 (c)

For this particular section an objective was used from the original Framework for Partnership in Local Authorities, one from the management's side and one from the trade unions side. The reason for this was to see if the partnership group was achieving or have achieved their objectives.

Question 3: One of the principles set down in A Framework for Partnership within the Local Authority System is that “Managers getting much more input from line managers, employees so that support is there for change and they don't feel they have to make the decisions on their own”. In your opinion has this been the case to date?

Manager (A) stated “ Interaction is needed with people but from my perspective we are getting more input from managers at all levels and staff even as to how things should be improved. As a manager I certainly welcome that, it leads for much better work environment and at the end of the day the objectives we set, we achieve them together.

We don't achieve them because one manager is outstanding and driving ahead. There is a famous saying that comes to mind from Mahatma Gandhi “that you don't lead cows from the front, you have to lead them from behind” and I firmly believe managers need to be there but they can benefit from the inputs of staff from all levels”.

Manager (2) stated that “it has been the case in the Water Service Department and this is a sub section from partnership. On the bigger scale I’m not so sure on the bigger scale whether it has been successful as well as it had in that particular department, but it’s definitely progressing”.

Question 3: One of the principles set down in A Framework for Partnership within the Local Authority System is that “Trade Unions will have a greater say for their members in the decision making process and thus will give the union representatives more time for other issues to focus on without dealing with the fallout from bad communications or lack of involvement”. In your opinion has this been the case to date?

Trade Union Official (1) believes that the objective had been achieved but outlined that there are still trade union officials that will stand back from the partnership process. This was because some Trade Union Officials were sceptical of the whole partnership concept and believed that it threatened their positions in the industrial relations arena and were also of the view that industrial relations would die under partnership and the role of the trade unions would die with it.

Trade Union Official (2) outlined “there is not doubt that the organisation has become more transparent in all its dealings with elected members, general public, staff and trade unions. This has helped with relations even without the partnership process. Members now have a direct say in the future direction of the organisation particularly through Partnership, Performance Management Development System, and Business Plans etc.

This has allowed the trade unions to deal with more complex issues like reorganisation of Waste Management, Waterworks and Main Drainage to name a few”.

Both Managers and Trade Union Officials believe the objectives have been carried out to a certain degree.

Section 1 (d)

Question 4: Sustaining Partnership over a long period of time and embedding it into an organisations culture is, and has been, in the past a major challenge for stakeholders involved in the process. Do you believe the Corporate Partnership Group has been successful in achieving this?

Manager (1) outlined that yes partnership is embedded into the organisation successfully and believes that it is a way of doing business and it's a successful way of engaging with staff and with trade unions on issues impacting on the organisation. Manager (1) did outline that at the beginning when partnership was only introduced into the organisation there were a few problems. “One of the issues we had a difficulty with at the beginning, is that some staff members felt that trade unions didn't represent them and therefore they were excluded from the partnership process, which is an interesting take because in an organisation like this not everybody is a member of a trade union but not everybody has access to the partnership process.

At the beginning of the process we had staff representatives on as part of the group but then they were removed because the trade unions felt that they should represent all staff.

We were left with management-trade unions as distinct from management, trade unions and staff representatives. At the moment it's firmly embedded in the organisation. I don't know to what extent that it represents all staff though, as I say there are quite a number of employees that are not members of a trade union and how do you communicate with them"

Managers (2) agreed that partnership is embedded firmly into the organisations culture and believes that it will continue to be successful.

Trade Union Official (1) felt that the organisation is very different today than it was pre partnership and described the organisation as a totally different organisation and that the partnership process has helped to promote that change.

Trade Union Official (2) also outlined that partnership is indeed embedded into the organisation. As a new process it was necessary to deliver some small but immediate "wins" and this was achieved to secure buy-in from members. Then other more medium and long-term targets were delivered to embed the process into the culture of the organisation.

All agreed that the group had been successful in embedding partnership into the organisations culture.

Section 2 (a) & (b)

Question 5 & 6: One of the key assumptions behind Partnership is that it can deliver mutual gains to all stakeholders. Some critics however, have stated that Management ultimately gain from Partnership. Do you think this is the case? Who do you believe will gain ultimately from the Partnership process?

Manager (1) outlined management do gain from partnership but also believe the trade unions gain from partnership. Both management and trade unions gain tremendously from it and no doubt management gain from meaningful engagement with the trade unions on a range of issues. In the case of management, through engagement on some major projects and major change issues, that those changes are for the better of the organisation and the citizens of Dublin and have been achieved through partnership and I have absolutely no doubt about that. The trade unions and their members benefited, management benefited and society benefited because if we had continued in the way we were going we would have been totally overpriced, inefficient and you can't continue with that at the end of the day.

Manager (2) stated that management benefit from the process, as do all the other stakeholders. The trade union officials have more of an input into what's done, how it's done, when it's done why it's done, etc. Everybody benefits from Partnership.

Trade Union Official (1) outlined the main issue for trade unions was better conditions of employment for employees, direct labour etc and likewise management wanted better services and more efficient services etc. and that worked. As outlined earlier, there is a

whole better workplace as a result of the partnership process. When it comes to partnership, there is very little that the trade union can bring to the table in relation to agenda items, so management always have agenda items. They are always the people that are seeking the change and the unions always have to react to that. So, how we operate under the partnership model is, go back to our list and cross-reference it and ask if the change benefits our members.

Trade Union Official (2) stated that it would be silly to say that management will not ultimately gain from partnership. Otherwise why would they be involved in it? But equally the members gain from it. It's a win/win scenario. If either side is constantly winning to the detriment of the other side then adversarial situations will take over from partnership. Sustaining partnership will actually be harder for the unions than management over the coming years as the membership see a lot of gains having been lost resulting in faith in both unions and management at very low ebb.

All outlined above, management do gain from partnership but so do trade unions and their members. However employees who are not members of any trade union don't seem to be factored into this group of gains.

Section 2 – Part (c)

Question 7: What in your opinion is the biggest benefit to the organisation from Partnership?

Manager (1) and Trade Union Official (1) both outlined that the biggest benefit to the organisation from partnership was better working relationships all round. Manager (1) felt that the whole process of engagement, the process of getting to know the main parties involved in the partnership be it trade union or management. Being able to interact informally with people on issues that are arising, in that sense it's a healthy process and works well.

Manager (2) felt that higher levels of trust now existed between staff and management. The staff is not afraid of the management anymore and management are not afraid of them anymore and this was the case in the past.

Trade Union Official (2) outlined one of the biggest benefits from partnership was major change is now negotiated rather than enforced. Change is always difficult but enforced change causes major difficulties for the unions in both the short and longer term.

Section 3 (a)

Question 8: Do you think the Partnership Model has been successful in Dublin City Council to date?

Manager (1) outlined that partnership model has been a complete success in the organisation.

Manager (2) believes that the partnership model has been extremely successful within the organisation.

Trade Union Official (1) saw that partnership improved particularly in the delivery of policies and delivery of change and outlined that there have been some major changes throughout the organisation which would've been highly adversarial if it hadn't been for partnership. Indeed we would still probably be talking/arguing about them now. What happened from the start was that the industrial relations issues were taken away from the partnership table as the industrial relations issues could have taken the focus off the partnership process.

Trade Union Official (2) believes that it is very difficult to quantify Partnership success or failure. But members now have a far greater say in the organisation than they had 15-20 years ago. On that basis you would have to say it has been successful but is still a work in progress.

All agreed that the partnership model in the organisation has been extremely successful.

Section 3 (b)

Question 9: The use of Partnership as an approach to change varies considerably between Operational and Strategic issues. In relation to Dublin City Council's Corporate Partnership Group which category would you put it in? Strategic or Operational? Or both?

Manager (1) felt that at the beginning, there were a lot of minor operational issues. The group have moved into the strategic and moved into it because of necessity. The group had to deal with many big change issues in this organisation. Partnership has played a very valuable role in the strategic issues and indeed the setting up of working groups across the organisation. In some cases, it has been slow process but then getting meaningful change is a slow process anyway. It's a worthwhile way of doing business and it works.

Manager (2) felt it was mainly strategic but there has been some emphasis on the specific, but it's both.

Trade Union Official (2) believes it's largely at strategic levels. Operational change is still negotiated locally through long standing arrangements. But the trust that has developed through partnership has undoubtedly helped such local negotiations.

Both Managers and Trade Union Official (1) agreed that the partnership agenda's are both operational and strategic.

Section 3 (c)

Question 9: What has partnership achieved over a 10 year period?

Manager (1) outlined the following benefits to having a partnership process in the organisation. “Over the past five years it has achieved major change in the whole area of waste management and the way the organisation conducts its business. It’s moved to a stage where Waste Management Crews are on the streets of Dublin for 22 hours a day, everyday. Improvements in the whole area of water supply, the whole issue in relation to the Housing Maintenance Workforce. There have been numerous changes right across the board and partnership has facilitated that. The big issue for management is the whole area of Performance Management Development System, which has had benefits for staff and management. At the same time it is to ensure that people are more focused on what their doing and on their work and they can contribute in a meaningful way with their manager as to how they do their work. Partnership has achieved so much over the last ten years”.

Manager (2) felt that the build up of trust between management and trade unions and staff even though they are not directly represented now was a major achievement through partnership. There have also been practical changes in relation to how the organisation does its business both with management and with the public. The public perception has improved because the organisation has improved services, done things differently, more efficiently and more effectively so there are huge benefits.

Trade Union Official (1) felt that there are visible benefits over the last 10 years.

Trade Union Official (2) outlined that the single biggest thing that partnership has given trade unions is a voice mechanism that will actually be heard. Trade unions won't always get what they want but at least they get a full and fair hearing.

Section 3 (d)

Question 10: In the event of the current conflict not abating how would you see Partnership in Dublin City Council in the future? Do you see it dead in the water or can the momentum of the last 10 years be maintained?

Manager (1) believed that the current conflict is abating. If it hadn't well then partnership wouldn't be as effective without the participation of the trade unions. I don't see it dead in the water, because the organisation is certainly committed to the concept. There are some of the trade unions that are still involved so management would continue with them.

Manager (2) believes that at a national level that it's dead in the water. At a local level however the trust has been built up enough within the department that it would be able to go on and that's the intention.

Trade Union Official (1) said some of the unions have withdrawn from the partnership, while other trade unions have continued with the process. The reason for staying in is that change is coming and the trade unions need to be part of that change. Partnership is a great conjugant of communication between the parties and it was important to keep that conjugant open.

Trade Union Official (2) stated that the trade unions attach no blame to local management for the current situation. Equally the management accepts that the unions must be seen to do something to preserve their member's rights. The dispute obviously affects certain things in the short term. But long term it will have no bearing.

Section 3 (d) 2

Question 10: The Trade Unions have withdrawn at present from Partnership process due to the current Industrial Relation Dispute, could you see Partnership evolving in a different model e.g. Management proceeding with non-union members?

Manager (1) outlined that it might very well be that staff members move in and take a greater interest in the whole process so you could find it evolving into something else, involving non union members because with the EU Directive on Consultation & Participation being passed into Irish law there are obligations under this legislation to consult with employees on various issues so that could mean a different process would evolve.

Manager (2) believes that it would be no and the reason for that is how do you represent non union members by definition. They are non-union members so they all have their own independent opinions. There's no collective voice that can represent them other than the trade unions.

Trade Union Official (1) no answer

Trade Union Official (2) outlined that it would be impossible for management to proceed unilaterally. The organisation is highly unionised and it would be folly to proceed with no cooperation from union members. You can't have a partnership with only one partner.

Section 3 (d) 3

Question 11: If this latter process was to be engaged what would the implications be for Management/Union relationships?

Manager (1) the management would have an obligation to keep staff informed as the obligation is there. It's really a matter for the trade unions to decide. We would be open to continuing relationships with the trade unions. Management are engaged with 6000 staff not just with the union members.

Manager (2) believes that if this was to happen it would go back to the adversarial old style way of doing things, conflict and confrontation.

Trade Union Official (1) no answer

Trade Union Official (2) believes that trade union don't see local management as responsible for the current situation. However if this proposal was to be tried it would set back relationships about 20 years. Plus it just wouldn't work.

5.2 Employee Interviews

Five employees not directly involved in the process of partnership were interviewed.

This was to get a general knowledge of what employees think and know about partnership.

The questions are broken down into three sections.

Employees are coded into Employees (a), (b), (c), (d) & (e)

Area 1

- a) successful partnership in the organisation
- b) benefits from partnership to the organisation
- c) what has been achieved over the last 10 years

Area 2

- a) delivery on gains for all stakeholders,
- b) who ultimately gains from partnership process,
- c) built up trust between stakeholders
- d) can partnership handle change in the future

Area 3

- Employees overall opinion on partnership

Three of the five employees are members of a trade union.

Area 1 a)

Question 1: Do you think the Partnership Model has been successful in Dublin City Council to date?

Four of the five employees were positive about partnership and believed it to be a success throughout the organisation. Employee (a) stated that partnership model was successful to a certain degree. Employee (b) stated that with the new systems, procedures have been put in place – seems to have run smoothly with no industrial action taken (until recently!!)

Area 1 b)

Question 2: What in your opinion is the biggest benefit to the organisation from Partnership?

Employees (b) and (d) both outlined that the biggest benefit is that staff have a bigger say in what happens within the organisation. If change is to happen it's discussed and consulted with the employees and not bludgeoned through. The relationship between management and staff has improved through partnership. Employee (b) outlined that through the partnership process new work systems and procedures have been put in place and this has improved the services that the organisation provides to the public. Employee (a) stated that the benefit to the organisation was actually the perception of the idea of partnership itself. Employee (e) outlined that the process has opened up a good communication channel between senior management and staff.

Area 1 c)

Question 3: What has Partnership achieved over a 10 year period?

Three of the five employees outlined that improved working systems, procedures for staff, improved efficiency in the services that are provided to the public and training and funding provided. Employee (c) stated that huge improvements had come in Health and Safety, family friendly policies including flexi time, force majeure leave and unpaid leave. Employee (d) also outlined that the improvement in relationship between staff, management and trade unions contributed to the modernisation of the organisation. Employee (d) also stated that the process has worked very well as there has been very little industrial action or strike action in the last 10 years. Employee (a) didn't know but stated that maybe a more visible format for discussions between Management and stakeholders. Employee (e) outlined that they had very little knowledge on partnership.

Area 2 a) & b)

Question 4 & 5: One of the key assumptions behind Partnership is that it can deliver mutual gains to all stakeholders. Some critics however, have stated that Management ultimately gain from Partnership. Do you think this is the case?

Employee (a) & (e) agreed that management gain from partnership and the gains to management are much greater than the gains for other stakeholders and it facilitates management's agenda with some reference to the stakeholders. Employees (b) and (d) disagreed that management ultimately gained from partnership and outlined that's all parties benefit from the process. Decisions are made by involvement of staff not just management and trade unions.

Employee (b) believes that if everyone is involved in decision making process, changes can be made faster. Management don't make decisions on their own because staff has a bigger say in what happens in the organisation. Employee (d) stated that "I don't agree. Of course management gain from the process. However, in my opinion, I think that all parties benefit from Partnership. It encourages the smooth implementation of change in the workplace when management and trade union officials (on behalf of staff) negotiate an agreed approach". Employee (c) believes that the two propositions are not mutually exclusive. Management obviously gained with the effective guarantee of industrial peace throughout a period of huge change. But staff also gained with new family friendly policies and H & S Improvements to name just two.

Area 2 b)

Question 5: Who do you believe will gain ultimately from the Partnership process?

Employees (b), (c) and (d) agreed that all parties gain from partnership. Employee (a) believes that management ultimately gain. Employee (c) stated that partnership by definition must be a symbiotic relationship and a marriage of equals. Obviously at any given time management might be gaining more than staff or indeed vice versa. But in the medium and long term, both sides must be seen to be gaining for the process to survive. Employee (e) outlined that in the present climate, nobody gains as the process will be used as another bureaucracy boundary in either delaying changes within the organisation or pushing for unreasonable demands in the present economic climate.

Area 2 c)

Question 6: Do you think the current Industrial Relations Dispute will affect the trust built up between Management and Trade Unions in relation to the Partnership Process?

All employees believe that the build up of trust between the parties will not be affected by the current industrial relations disputes. Employees (c) and (d) outline that on a macro level the trust which existed is almost gone and will be difficult to rebuild. Employee(c) believes that if the trade unions walk away it would be “akin to the throwing the baby out with the bath water” Also that the dispute centred on getting pay cuts reversed and the management were affected by these cuts the same as the staff. In fact privately, most managers were hoping that the dispute would succeed. Employee (d) believes that management and trade unions are mature enough to know that the industrial action was not a personal issue.

Area 2 d)

Question 7: With the industrial relations dispute now resolved do you think the Partnership Process will be the best channel to handling the changes outlined in the Croke Park deal?

All employees agreed that the partnership process would be able to handle the changes mapped out in the Croke Park Deal. Employee (b) outlined that it is vital that the staff are involved in these talks and that the decisions to be taken are done so by staff, trade unions and management alike.

Employee (c) outlined that the single biggest “sellers” of the Croke Park Deal were the Heads of ICTU, IMPACT and SIPTU rather than the management side. Therefore it is axiomatic

that the trade unions want that deal to work. And the ONLY way to make it work is with the co-operation of the workforce through the Partnership Process. Employee (e) believes that in order for the partnership to continue, it is a must that it is used in order to deliver on recommendations in the Croke Park deal. Failure of the partnership to act within a reasonable timeframe, could lead to the nails being hammered into its coffin.

Area 3 General

Question 9: What is your overall opinion on Partnership in general?

Employee (a) I think the concept of it is a great idea, but more use could be made of the process, perhaps the Croke Park will provide this.

Employee (b) seems to be a good idea and outlined that up until now seems to have worked. Time will tell if it will work with new deal.

Employee (c) The Irish Partnership Model is not unique and simply mirrors that which existed in some large non-union, multi nationals decades ago. The Partnership Model has lasted the trip in those cases because both sides remained committed to it through thick and thin. The Irish Model should equally not only survive but prosper provided that all sides remain committed to it.

Employee (d) in my opinion, Partnership has been very positive for Dublin City Council. Issues are discussed at an early stage so that all parties can take an agreed approach on the best way to utilise our resources to provide efficient and cost effective services to the citizens of Dublin. It has contributed to improved working conditions where management and staff work together with very little tension.

Employee (e) My opinion on Partnership is not much other than is it another level of bureaucracy in an organisation that has already got more levels of bureaucracy than the number of floor levels in Civic Offices. We shall see over the coming years, during hard times in the council when change is needed without the carrot of promotion, will the partnership have the stick to beat the changes that will satisfy both senior management and trade unions.

5.3 Summary of Combined Findings

- **Trust Built up**

Management, Trade Union Officials and Employees all agreed that the trust built up between the parties will not be affected by the current industrial relations dispute. It was outlined by some that maybe at a National Level but certainly not at Workplace Level as the relationship built up between the various stakeholders is mature enough to know that it wasn't the fault of Management or indeed Trade Unions and decisions were made outside this group at a higher level.

- **Successful Partnership**

When analysing and contrasting all interviews, all interviewees believed partnership in the organisation to be a success and some believe that it will continue to successful. One Manager did outline that maybe the Trade Unions should not have pulled away from the Partnership process at the first sign of trouble and that they should have tried to work through the problems.

- **Biggest benefits to the organisation**

Nearly all employees believed the biggest gain to the organisation was that employees have a bigger say and they are consulted on issues involving change. Managers and Trade Union Officials outlined that they thought the biggest benefit was better working relationships all round and the process of engagement and higher levels of trust.

- **What has been achieved?**

Most employees, managers and trade unions officials outlined new improved working systems and improved efficiency in the services. Improvements in family friendly policies including flexi-time and leave without pay. All agreed once again that one big improvement was the working relationship between management, employees and trade unions. One trade union official stated that “the biggest thing that partnership has given trade unions is a voice mechanism that will actually be heard. Trade unions won’t always get what they want but at least they get a full and fair hearing”.

From the findings above there are gains for all stakeholders as also outlined by Roche and O’Dowd’s in their studies on workplace partnership. Kochan’s Model of Mutual Gains Enterprise has aspects that have been outlined by the interviewees in this study for example climate of co operation and trust, employee involvement in problem solving , investment in training and development and top management commitment.

- **Delivery of mutual gains**

Most of the interviewees agree that management gain from partnership but also believe that others benefit like employee’s and trade unions. One trade union official commented that it’s a win/win scenario. If either side is constantly winning to the detriment of the other side then adversarial situations will take over from partnership. Sustaining partnership will actually be harder for the unions than management over the coming years as the membership see a lot of gains having been lost resulting in faith in both unions and

management being at very low ebb. One manager also outlined that at the beginning when partnership was being established that the group consisted of employees, trade unions and management then employees were removed on the request of the trade unions because they felt that they represented all the employees in the organisation. However as there is 6000 employees in the organisation and they are not all members of a trade union in fact at least 30/40% wouldn't be members of a trade union. This implies that not all employees are represented by partnership.

One Trade Union Official did outline that when it comes to partnership there is very little that the trade union can bring to the table in relation to agenda items, so management always have the agenda items. So how we operate is that we look at the change that is wanted and check does this benefit our members.

- **Who ultimately gains**

One employee agreed that management ultimately gain from partnership and agendas are management focused. This backs Kelly theory that management gains. Another employee outlined that in the current climate nobody gains from the process.

CHAPTER SIX - CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

At the outset of this dissertation I outlined the main aim as being “An examination of Workplace Partnership in a Public Sector Organisation during the recession, namely Dublin City Council, with recommendations in relation to an alternative way forward for Partnership”

I have examined Partnership from the theorist viewpoint and from the practical viewpoint as outlined in my findings. These findings have shown an extreme of viewpoints ranging from partnership being another layer of bureaucracy to partnership being a total 100% success however I reiterate that these are the extremes. A more measured conclusion from these findings from the management, trade unions and employees perspectives would conclude the following: -

- 1) On the macro and micro level that any reasonable person would conclude that the findings don't conflict with the conclusions of the theorists.
- 2) Partnership on the macro level from all perspectives worked extremely well since its introduction in 1987 at its more basis level and since 2000 when it was devolved to include workplace partnership
- 3) Workplace partnership has worked in the public sector from its slow beginnings in the year 2000. This hesitant start was clearly attributable to the adversarial roles which had prevailed on all sides in the industrial relations arena for years past

- 4) All sides agree that the adversarial situation was quickly replaced by the advent of trust.
- 5) My findings clearly outline that the single greatest core value of workplace partnership relationships are high levels of trust
- 6) Workplace partnership and the trust element that has evolved has facilitated major change in the public sector organisation in terms of restructuring and reorganisation of services which had historically been inefficient and financial black holes into services which can now compete with the threat of outsourcing to third parties. It is accepted that such restructuring was negotiated at industrial relations level. But it is without doubt as outlined earlier that the trust that had been created through partnership permeated positively into the industrial relations field
- 7) On a more negative note this research clearly demonstrates that while strong levels of trust remain at local level at national level relationships have effectively broken down
- 8) Another negative observation from the research is that although the public sector organisation is highly unionised only approximately 60 percent of the workforce are trade union members (this is a best guess because concrete statistics are not available). Initially non-union members were included in the workplace partnership group but were excluded at the request of trade union officials this is an obvious gap in the partnership process. It also contradicts the definition of partnership as outlined in the Partnership 2000 agreement. Similarly it conflicts with best practice as outlined early

as being recommended by the theorist. On a purely simplistic level it seems incomprehensible to actively set out to exclude 40percent of the staff from the partnership process.

9) Back to the positives, despite the recent travails created by the industrial disputes, work to rules etc there appears to be a genuine desire from both the management and trade unions to retain the momentum of workplace partnership that has developed over the last ten years. This is despite it being acknowledged that tough times lie ahead with the fallout from the Croke Park Deal. This is particularly noticeable from the elements of the trade unions who continue to embrace and support the workplace partnership process when they could have cynically cut & run and reverted to the adversarial situation which prevailed in the past.

10) The virtues of partnership, as extolled by both the management and the trade unions do not appear to have cascaded fully to the employees. My findings from five employees outline that in one case partnership is perceived as a bureaucratic non – entity while two other employees claim to know nothing about partnership. This could indicate that management and trade unions are operating in a partnership vacuum or a bubble which results in a knowledge deficient for the employees that they both purport to represent

11) Points 8 and 10 above show that 40 percent of employees are not actively represented at the partnership table while three out of five employees interviewed either knew very little about partnership or had a very low opinion of the process. If this trend was to be replicated across the entire workforce it would bode very poorly for partnership into the future. The EU Directive on Consultation and Information which was enshrined into Irish law in 2006. This legislation puts a legal onus on employers to inform the entire workforce of certain decisions made that will affect their conditions of employment. When this legislation becomes fully operable it will put a renewed obligation on the partnership participants. And they will certainly need to disseminate information in a more meaningful way than heretofore if my findings in relation to three out of five employees are to be accepted.

12) My conclusions must end on a positive note despite the obvious flaws in the partnership process outlined above, partnership has clearly been shown to have been a positive development for all stakeholders with the pluses far outweighing the minuses although as one of my interviewees so eloquently put it that partnership “remains a working progress”.

6.2 Recommendations

A. At national level partnership has served the country well since 1987. Recent developments have effectively set this progress back to zero however, all sides must positively reengage in the process in the national interest despite the obvious difficulties. To quote the old adage “we will hang together or we will hang separately”.

- B. Workplace partnership has worked well for ten years despite a number of flaws. Certain elements of the trade union movement have withdrawn from the process for strategic reasons these trade unions must re - engage positively
- C. There has been some suggestion that local management might attempt to continue the partnership process without co-operation from the trade unions. This cannot be countenanced in a highly unionised environment. This is perhaps more pertinently in my interview findings when my interviewee states “how can you have a partnership with only one partner”
- D. The public sector organisation has approximately 60 percent of trade union saturation. The remaining 40 percent of non-unions members are not represented at the partnership table and this is a glaring gap and omission in the process. In fact it is even more glaring because this 40 percent of staff were consciously excluded from the process rather than an innocent act of omission. This situation must be redressed.
- E. The views of the success of workplace partnership by both management and trade unions are not shared by a substantial number of employees if my findings are to be accepted as being even reasonably accurate. This suggests that a communication deficient between the partnership group and the employees. A better method of communicated the work of the partnership group to all employees must be found.

F. Barack Obama was elected president on the platform of CHANGE. The recent British election was won by adopting a similar stance. The Croke Park Deal can equally be summed up by the word CHANGE. The Croke Park Deal can variously be viewed as a challenge, an opportunity or a threat. But what is indisputable from this deal is that change must happen and happen quickly. This change must also be reflected in real savings across the public sector as a whole. The challenges which confront all parties are very obvious. Therefore these parties must even more positively embrace the partnership process to facilitate the necessary change despite the obvious difficulties which they must confront.

G. My final recommendation is that partnership has helped us through the boom times. Provided that everybody puts their shoulder to the wheel, partnership can also see us through the bust times. This recession cannot last forever or as Shakespeare says “when winter comes can spring be far behind it”

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APPENDICES CONTENT

- Appendix 1: Management Interview Questions
- Appendix 2: Trade Union Interview Questions
- Appendix 3: Employee Interview Questions
- Appendix 4: Sample Transcription of a Management Interview

Questions for Management – Corporate Partnership Forum

- 1) How long have you been involved in the Corporate Partnership Forum Group?
- 2) Was it difficult at the beginning to get buy in from the various stakeholders?
- 3) Does it become difficult if managers/trade union leave the group (be it due to promotion/transfer etc) to re-establish the dynamics of the group?
- 4) Sustaining Partnership over a long period of time and embedding it into an organisations culture is, and has been, in the past a major challenge for stakeholders involved in the process. Do you believe the Corporate Partnership Group has been successful in achieving this?
- 5) The idea behind Partnership was to remove the old style adversarial industrial relations approach to change and replace it with a more open, informative relationship between Employers, Trade Unions and Employees.
 - In your opinion do you think this has been achieved? Or is the old style still active under the cover of Partnership?
- 6) High levels of trust are outlined in all literature on Partnership as being a key element to the success of a Partnership. Do you think the current Industrial Relations Dispute will affect the trust built up between Management and Trade Unions?
- 7) One of the principles set down in A Framework for Partnership within the Local Authority System is that “Managers getting much more input from line managers, employees so that support is there for change and they don’t feel they have to make the decisions on their own”. In your opinion has this been the case to date?

- 8) One of the key assumptions behind Partnership is that it can deliver mutual gains to all stakeholders. Some critics however, have stated that Management ultimately gain from Partnership.
- Do you think this is the case?
- 9) Who do you believe will gain ultimately from the Partnership process?
- 10) Do you think the Partnership Model has been successful in Dublin City Council to date?
- 11) How do you think employees who are not directly part of the Partnership Group or process perceive the Partnership concept?
- 12) What in your opinion is the biggest benefit to the organisation from Partnership?
- 13) In the event of the current conflict not abating how would you see Partnership in Dublin City Council in the future? Do you see it dead in the water or can the momentum of the last 10 years be maintained?
- 14) The Trade Unions have withdrawn at present from Partnership process due to the current Industrial Relation Dispute, could you see Partnership evolving in a different model e.g. Management proceeding with non-union members?
- 15) If this latter process was to be engaged what would the implications be for Management/Union relationships?
- 16) The use of Partnership as an approach to change varies considerably between Operational and Strategic issues. In relation to Dublin City Council's Corporate Partnership Group which category would you put it in? Strategic or Operational? Or both?

- 17) Some may make the comment that the Partnership process is just another talking shop. What is your view and do you believe that Partnership has worked?
- 18) What has Partnership achieved over a 10 year period?
- 19) There is no doubt that the Social Partnership Process has brought about a huge level of stability in the Industrial Relations arena over a long period of time. Do you believe that this process needed a revamp or a review notwithstanding the current and potential industrial relations strife?
- 20) It is perceived from a local level that much of the decision making in relation to wage agreement rests at a higher level within the unions and management, and that much of the power has been taken away from the individual on the ground. What is your view on this and do you believe that the Corporate Partnership Process might have a role in changing that perception?

Questions for Trade Union Officials – Corporate Partnership Forum

- 1) How long have you been involved in the Corporate Partnership Forum Group?
- 2) Was it difficult at the beginning to get buy in from the various stakeholders?
- 3) Does it become difficult if Trade Union Officials/Managers leave the group (be it due to promotion/transfer etc) to re-establish the dynamics of the group?
- 4) Sustaining Partnership over a long period of time and embedding it into an organisations culture is, and has been, in the past a major challenge for stakeholders involved in the process. Do you believe the Corporate Partnership Group has been successful in achieving this?
- 5) The idea behind Partnership was to remove the old style adversarial industrial relations approach to change and replace it with a more open, informative relationship between Employers, Trade Unions and Employees.
 - In your opinion do you think this has been achieved? Or is the old style still active under the cover of Partnership?
- 6) High levels of trust are outlined in all literature on Partnership as being a key element to the success of a Partnership. Do you think the current Industrial Relations Dispute will affect the trust built up between Trade Unions and Management?
- 7) One of the principles set down in A Framework for Partnership within the Local Authority System is that “Trade Unions will have a great say for their members in the decision making process and thus will give the union representatives more time for other issues to focus on without dealing with the fallout from bad communications or lack of involvement”. In your opinion has this been the case to date?

- 8) One of the key assumptions behind Partnership is that it can deliver mutual gains to all stakeholders. Some critics however, have stated that Management ultimately gain from Partnership.
 - Do you think this is the case?
- 9) Who do you believe will gain ultimately from the Partnership process?
- 10) Do you think the Partnership Model has been successful in Dublin City Council to date?
- 11) How do you think employees who are not directly part of the Partnership Group or process perceive the Partnership concept?
- 12) What in your opinion is the biggest benefit to the organisation from Partnership?
- 13) In the event of the current conflict not abating how would you see Partnership in Dublin City Council in the future? Do you see it dead in the water or can the momentum of the last 10 years be maintained?
- 14) The Trade Unions have withdrawn at present from Partnership process due to the current Industrial Relation Dispute, could you see Partnership evolving in a different model e.g. Management proceeding with non-union members?
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- 18) What has Partnership achieved over a 10 year period?
- 19) There is no doubt that the Social Partnership Process has brought about a huge level of stability in the Industrial Relations arena over a long period of time. Do you believe that this process needed a revamp or a review notwithstanding the current and potential industrial relations strife?
- 20) It is perceived from a local level that much of the decision making in relation to wage agreement rests at a higher level within the unions and management, and that much of the power has been taken away from the individual on the ground. What is your view on this and do you believe that the Corporate Partnership Process might have a role in changing that perception?

Questions for Employees – Corporate Partnership Forum

- 1) Are you a member of a Trade Union?
- 2) Do you think the Partnership Model has been successful in Dublin City Council to date?
- 3) One of the key assumptions behind Partnership is that it can deliver mutual gains to all stakeholders. Some critics however, have stated that Management ultimately gain from Partnership.

- Do you think this is the case?
- 4) Who do you believe will gain ultimately from the Partnership process?
- 5) Do you think the current Industrial Relations Dispute will affect the trust built up between Management and Trade Unions in relation to the Partnership Process?
- 6) What in your opinion is the biggest benefit to the organisation from Partnership?
- 7) With the industrial relations dispute now resolved do you think the Partnership Process will be the best channel to handling the changes outlined in the Croke Park deal?
- 8) What has Partnership achieved over a 10 year period?
- 9) What is your overall opinion on Partnership in general?

**Sample Transcript of Management Interview
Corporate Partnership Forum**

1) How long have you been involved in the Corporate Partnership Forum Group?

I've been involved in the partnership process four to five years now. I became a member of the Corporate Partnership Forum Group when I was Executive Manager in the Human Resources Department so I've been with the process for a long time.

2) Was it difficult at the beginning to get buy in from the various stakeholders?

I don't think it was. I think there were certainly suspicions about it at the beginning and I suppose we were a bit suspicious overall. From what I can recall, there was difficulty about tackling the bigger issues and we probably paid a lot of lip service to our relationship around the table dealing with the smaller type items. There was a sort of reluctance to mention the unmentionables in the room. I suppose that's all part of the build up of trust in a good working relationship, but certainly at the beginning, while there was buy in and commitment to the partnership process there was still reluctance on both sides to embrace it fully and deal with the real issues that were impacting on the organisation.

3) Does it become difficult if managers/trade union leave the group (be it due to promotion/transfer etc) to re-establish the dynamics of the group?

I don't think it does actually. I think if people are leaving the group for promotion/transfers or retirements and their replaced by another union member or a management member, it doesn't cause any difficulty. Inferably, what happens is that the new person takes the time to bed in. They need to get used to what's going on and they have to read up on a lot of documents/minutes relevant to Partnership. This applies to both sides and eventually they find their feet and they start making a contribution to the partnership meetings. I don't think it affects the dynamics of the group.

4) Sustaining Partnership over a long period of time and embedding it into an organisations culture is, and has been, in the past a major challenge for stakeholders involved in the process. Do you believe the Corporate Partnership Group has been successful in achieving this?

I think we have been successful. I think partnership is firmly embedded into Dublin City Council and I think it works. I firmly belief that partnership is embedded into the culture of

the organisation. It is a way of doing business. It's a successful way of engaging with the staff and with the unions on issues impacting on the organisation. One of the issues we had a difficulty with at the beginning, is that some staff members felt that trade unions didn't represent them and therefore they were excluded from the partnership process, which is an interested take because in an organisation like this not everybody is a member of a trade union but not everybody has access to the partnership process.

At the beginning of the process we had staff representatives on as part of the group but then they were removed because the trade unions felt that they should represent all staff. We were left with management-trade unions as distinctive from management, trade unions and staff representatives. At the moment it's firmly embedded in the organisation. I don't know to what extent that it represents all staff though, as I say there is quite a number of employees that are not members of a trade union and how do you communicate with them? The EU Directive on Consultation & Participation has been passed into legislation by Irish law and it outlines obligations for employers in consulting and informing employees of the organisation on certain aspects. It has been agreed that negotiation and discussions with Trade Union deal with this but there are a group of employees that might feel that it's different.

5) The idea behind Partnership was to remove the old style adversarial industrial relations approach to change and replace it with a more open, informative relationship between Employers, Trade Unions and Employees.

- In your opinion do you think this has been achieved? Or is the old style still active under the cover of Partnership?

My answer to that is yes and no. It has been achieved to a very large extent. We do know our trade union people a lot better than we used to know them and the union people know the management a lot better. I suppose when you're meeting once a month in partnership and various conferences and seminars, you do build up a relationship with the individuals and I firmly believe that and particularly in working in the human resource area or indeed any area. It's all about getting things done through people so if you haven't got the relationships with people then immediately you're operating and negotiating in a vacuum or maybe even an adversarial vacuum so those relationships have been very fruitful to avoid difficulties in this organisation.

If you look back on the industrial relations manner in which we conducted our business we had no real strikes over the last 10 years. I attribute a lot of that to being able to sit down and

negotiate with the union people. If individual pocket issues arise the union people will come to the relevant manager or they'll go to human resources and things are sorted out before they escalate into difficulties. On the no side of that I think under the cover there is a bit of the old style still there and we saw that very clearly in the current industrial dispute where some of the unions withdrew from partnership and I don't necessarily agree with that type of response.

I think you can still maintain a particular stance but I think partnership is there for the rough and the smooth times. I think the tendency for the unions to withdraw from partnership at the first difficulty, even though it is a major difficulty, I think they should have worked their way through it and still respected their position. That's my view and that's why I said at the beginning that this is from a management perspective. I do think the old style adversarial is not as prominent but there are elements of it still and it might take another 5 years to root that out.

6) High levels of trust are outlined in all literature on Partnership as being a key element to the success of a Partnership. Do you think the current Industrial Relations Dispute will affect the trust built up between Management and Trade Unions?

I don't think it will. I think the reason for that is the management have a certain maturity about relationships and how we deal with unions and how we have to deal with people. I don't think it will impact but I don't think it was necessary for unions to withdraw from partnerships to make their point. The partnership is a workplace partnership and I think that should have worked on, as the management understood the union's position and the union should have understood the management's position. There is lots of work that could have been done for the benefit of everybody working in the organisation without withdrawing. I don't think it made a whit of difference as to what happened at the outcome and in fact my understanding is that it is a 2 to 1 in favour of the deal, so you wonder what was it all about. Again, this is a personal view.

7) One of the principles set down in A Framework for Partnership within the Local Authority System is that "Managers getting much more input from line managers, employees so that support is there for change and they don't feel they have to make the decisions on their own". In your opinion has this been the case to date?

I'm probably one of the unusual managers in that I believe that you have to collaborative with a lot of people to get things done and to get really good change introduced. This idea of

having a senior manager up there waving a flag and leading everybody, doesn't work. I think you have to interact with people but certainly from my perspective we are getting more input from managers at all levels and staff even as to how things should be improved. As a manager I certainly welcome that. It leads for a much better work environment and at the end of the day the objectives that we set, we achieve them together. We don't achieve them because one manager is outstanding and driving ahead.

There is a famous saying that comes to mind from Hatt McAndy "that you don't lead cows from the front, you have to lead them from behind" and I firmly believe managers need to be there but they can benefit from the inputs of staff from all levels. I think it's absolutely important to get input from line managers. That's the benefit of the whole performance management PMDS. Sitting down with staff is a relatively new thing in the local authority service and it's very worth while. It gives staff an opportunity to make their own points, while it gives management an opportunity to set the standard and to raise the bar and it works well.

8) One of the key assumptions behind Partnership is that it can deliver mutual gains to all stakeholders. Some critics however, have stated that Management ultimately gain from Partnership.

- Do you think this is the case?

I think management do gain from partnership but I also think the trade unions gain from partnership. In fact it's a case of getting our business done much quicker, much more effectively and having regard to all viewpoints. I think both management and trade unions gain tremendously from it and I've no doubt management gain from meaningful engagement with the trade unions on a range of issues.

I know in our own case, through our engagement on some major projects and major change issues, that those changes are for the better of the organisation and the citizens of Dublin, and have been achieved through partnership and I have absolutely no doubt about that. The trade unions and their members benefited, management benefited and society benefited because if we had continued in the way we were going we would have been totally overpriced, inefficient and you can't continue with that at the end of the day.

9) Who do you believe will gain ultimately from the Partnership process?

This also answers questions 9.

10) Do you think the Partnership Model has been successful in Dublin City Council to date?

I think it has absolutely it has worked extremely well. I regret the trade unions moving out of partnership. I think to a certain extent maybe that they might reflect on this and think differently about how they should approach these things in the future.

11) How do you think employees who are not directly part of the Partnership Group or process perceive the Partnership concept?

I say they would perceive it as being worthwhile. Although they might not be directly involved or directly members of trade unions they are engaging with people who are members of trade unions. If they weren't happy that would manifest itself on the floor somewhere. They are getting information and feedback through other colleagues in particular who are aware of what's going on.

One of the issues around partnership, is if your working environment is content and happy, things are working ok, you don't really care about partnership no more than you care about management. It's about coming in doing your job and going home and getting on with the rest of your life. It's only if difficulties arise in the workplace or there's issues impacting on you that the relevance of partnership becomes more prevalent.

I suspect there is quite a number of people in this organisation which is 6,000 employees, that don't know much about partnership and don't want to know about it. For others it's fairly relevant. It depends on your own particular circumstances as well. Overall, partnership is good for the City. Its interacting with the people who need to be interacted with and solving issues that if they weren't resolved would impact on these non members at some stage so in that sense they must see it as positive.

12) What in your opinion is the biggest benefit to the organisation from Partnership?

The whole process of engagement, the process of getting to know the main parties involved in the whole process be it trade union or management. Being able to interact informally with people on issues that are arising, in that sense it's a healthy process and works well.

13) In the event of the current conflict not abating how would you see Partnership in Dublin City Council in the future? Do you see it dead in the water or can the momentum of the last 10 years be maintained?

Luckily enough I think the conflict is abating. If it hadn't well then partnership wouldn't be as effective without the participation of the trade unions. I don't see it dead in the water, because the City Council are certainly committed to the concept. I think there are some of the trade unions that are still involved so we would continue with them. It might very well be that staff members move in and take a greater interest in the whole process so you could find it evolving into something else, involving non union members because we have the EU Directive on Consultation & Participation. There are obligations under that so a different process would evolve. I think we should be back in business fairly soon and we can motor on over the next 5 to 10 years and do better things.

14) The Trade Unions have withdrawn at present from Partnership process due to the current Industrial Relation Dispute, could you see Partnership evolving in a different model e.g. Management proceeding with non-union members?

15) If this latter process was to be engaged what would the implications be for Management/Union relationships?

The management would have an obligation to keep staff informed as the obligation is there. I don't know it's really a matter for the trade unions to decide. We would be open to continuing relationships with the trade unions. Management are engaged with 6000 staff not just with the union members.

16) The use of Partnership as an approach to change varies considerably between Operational and Strategic issues. In relation to Dublin City Council's Corporate Partnership Group which category would you put it in? Strategic or Operational? Or both?

I would put it into both. At the beginning, there were a lot of minor operational issues. We have moved into the strategic and we moved into it because of necessity. We had to deal with many big change issues in this organisation. Partnership has played a very valuable role in the strategic issues and indeed the setting up of working groups across the organisation. In some cases, it has been slow process but then I think getting meaningful change is a slow process anyway. It's a worthwhile way of doing business and it works.

17) Some may make the comment that the Partnership process is just another talking shop. What is your view and do you believe that Partnership has worked?

I believe it has worked. I have no doubt that partnership process is a talking shop and I would say that in a positive way because a lot of issues get discussed. It presents an opportunity for both sides to comment and for that reason it's a meaningful talking shop not in the negative sense as the media might portray it. It's very meaningful and I believe it has worked well.

18) What has Partnership achieved over a 10 year period?

Over the past five years we've achieved major change in the whole area of waste management and the way we do our business. We've moved to a stage where we have waste management crews on the roads of Dublin 22 hours a day everyday. We have improvements in the whole area of water supply, the whole issue in relation to housing maintenance workforce. There's been numerous changes right across the board and partnership has facilitated that.

I suppose the big issue for management is the whole area of performance management development system which has had benefits for staff and management. At the same time it is to ensure that people are more focused on what their doing and on their work and they can contribute in a meaningful way with their manager as to how they do their work. So yes partnership has achieved an awful lot over the last ten years.

I have no doubt that with this new public sector Croke Park agreement coming on board there will be even greater involvement for partnership to implement some of the major changes that

are envisaged under that agreement, and indeed under the Efficiency and Local Government Report, the Colm McCarthy report and An Bord Snip Report.

There will be plenty of issues to be discussed and hammered out over the next few years because we are entering into an era where the economic situation has changed drastically. It's impacting very much on local authorities. Staff levels are reducing quite seriously and we are going to have to restructure and decide what the priorities are over the coming years. All of this can be processed, I believe, very successfully through the partnership process.

19) There is no doubt that the Social Partnership Process has brought about a huge level of stability in the Industrial Relations arena over a long period of time. Do you believe that this process needed a revamp or a review notwithstanding the current and potential industrial relations strife?

I have no doubt social partnership has contributed to stability in industrial relations. Having said that we still have industrial relations issues that arise but they are dealt with in a much more reasonable manner by both the trade unions and management. I think that's because of the relationships that have been built up. There is an element of trust and we respect each others positions. We can deal with issues in a logical type of way that has brought about stability.

In the old days, we had the strike first and the negotiations afterwards. Nowadays, we have the negotiations first and we don't have a strike and I think the social partnership process and partnership forums here have attributed greatly to that. I think everything needs a review and a revamp from time to time. What needs to be revamped I'm not so sure. I think maybe one thing is that there has to be a commitment from trade unions and management that they don't walk away from the process at the first difficult issue that arises. There is a tendency to move away from the process when a serious issue arises. I think that's unfortunate and it shouldn't happen.

20) It is perceived from a local level that much of the decision making in relation to wage agreement rests at a higher level within the unions and management, and that much of the power has been taken away from the individual on the ground. What is your view on this and do you believe that the Corporate Partnership Process might have a role in changing that perception?

I think it's a good idea that the trade unions and management are looking at wage levels, they have regard to the greater economic situation that's impacting on the country. The idea that individuals on the ground decided that they needed a pay increase led to total anarchy. I don't think the partnership process have a role in that, in individual cases maybe, in relation to work improvements or new ways of doing things, but not in setting national pay rates. I think the way it's dealt with is much better. Although in hindsight, we were operating in a bit of an illusion, but generally speaking if you have proper economic information, you should be able to set the pay rates fairly well.