Centre Welcomed by Strategic Partners

For some people at least, partnership in the workplace is an empty formula, divorced from the reality of their everyday lives or, if it is part of that reality, something to be endured, or even an obstacle to decision-making in times of rapid change.

The role of the National Centre for Partnership and Performance is to change all that by showing – not saying – that partnership really can make a difference, whether in terms of improving productivity, or in terms of improving the delivery of public services, or, again, in terms of approving the equality of working life and work life balance.

I have no doubt that the centre will make a powerful and meaningful contribution to the management of organisational change in this country.

Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern, T.D. at the launch of the Centre.

This country’s remarkable success in recent years has shown us that competitive enterprises are the engines of growth. Whether Irish or foreign owned, whether large or small, competitive enterprises are those that are committed to higher productivity, higher skills and more investment in R&D. These are the enterprises that provide for higher living standards and the resources we require to improve our infrastructure, get better regional balance and improved social policies.

Continuing this success will require all organisations in the public and private sector to embrace radical organisational change, speed up the pace of adaptation to such change and modernise our workplaces for the future.

I look forward to the National Centre for Partnership and Performance giving leadership and advice on the kinds of workplace policies and practices we need for an advanced and dynamic economy and how we can work together to achieve this.

Taoiseach and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Mr Mary Harney, T.D.

Commenting recently on the need to place competitiveness at the top of the policy agenda, I pointed out that there needs to be a far stronger link between wage increases and productivity across all sectors of the economy. I am delighted that the NCPP has made this a priority in its strategy and operational plan.

Mr John Travers, Chief Executive, Forfás.

I welcome the highlighting by the Centre of health and safety as a particularly relevant area for partnership initiatives and we look forward to working closely with the Centre on this.

Mr Tom Boegner, Director General, Health and Safety Authority.

With the growth in competition, small and medium-size enterprises will require much more flexibility from employees and in the way work is organised and I am happy to see that the Centre has identified this as a priority for the future.

Mr Pat Delaney, Director, Small Firms Association.

A major challenge facing all of us in the public service, in particular in the health services and local government, is how to manage change through partnership. I am delighted the Centre has highlighted this as a key priority and I look forward to working with the Centre through the Health Services Partnership Forum and the Local Authority National Partnership Group.

Mr Matt Moggan, National Secretary, SIPTU.

The Equality Authority is working closely with the social partners to develop equality based workplaces that seek to include and accommodate the diversity of the workforce and to reconcile family life and work through flexible working arrangements. The National Centre for Partnership and Performance is right to highlight these as key priorities for the workplace now and into the future.

Mr Niall Crowley, Chief Executive, Equality Authority.

Implementation of the Health Strategy will require a significant programme of development and growth, reform and modernisation. The partnership arrangements in place nationally and in each of the health boards will be used as a vehicle for the involvement of staff and staff groups in the implementation of the strategy at national and local level. A central focus of partnership will be to explore ways of achieving organisational change and, now, more flexible forms of work organisation and I welcome the priority being given to these areas by the National Centre for Partnership and Performance.

Mr Michael Kelly, Secretary-General, Dept of Health and Children.

Modernising the World of Work

Businesses, public services and workplaces generally in Ireland are facing into a period of very significant change. While there is nothing new about change itself, the rate and depth of change now taking place is of a dimension different from virtually anything seen previously.

These changes, as we know, are happening because:

People are changing, leading more complex lives, placing more emphasis on personal development and access to learning and new rewards, seeking a better balance between family and workplace responsibilities and demanding greater choice, higher standards and more flexibility in the delivery of services;

Information and Communication Technologies have made possible the development of new systems of production and service delivery based on knowledge and information processing, leading to a shift from mass production to knowledge intensive jobs, from industry to services and fundamentally altering the nature and structure of work;

The increasing integration of the economies of the world, the emergence of global companies and the dramatic growth in international financial markets have accelerated the need for countries like Ireland to shift to higher skilled, high value-added, high income jobs with a sustained increase in productivity and R&D;

Workplace innovations including the large increase in the number of women workers, the rise in the knowledge and skills content of jobs and the move to more team and project-based working are altering fundamentally traditional management methods and the way in which work is organised.

I believe that this combination of multiple innovations will bring profound, long term changes in the way we organise work and our working lives, just as the earlier industrial revolution changed the world of work in its time. In recent years we have worked out how to develop a successful economy. A key question for all of us now is whether we have the same ability and capacity to creatively cause and manage changes in the workplace. And to do so in a way that protects competitiveness, maintains our living...
standards and improves the quality of working life for everybody, especially in the new set of economic circumstances. In seeking to answer that question, we should accept that modernising the world of work will require much more than a management of our prosperity from the national level by government, employees and unions. It will require all organisations and systems (including companies, public service bodies, managers, unions, industrial relations and systems of public policy and delivery) to embrace ongoing, radical organisational change.

Managers, employers and unions will need to work together to develop an on-going culture of co-operation and change that will bring about:

• New and more flexible forms of work organisation that improve productivity and organisational effectiveness;
• A better delivery of public services, in particular of our health services and public transport (including a linking of more resources to organisational change);
• Modern and more flexible workplaces adopted to the individual needs of employees, that provide lifelong learning, develop new forms of management and achieve a better balance between work and life, including family life;
• New systems that reward and measure good performance, including profit-sharing, employee shareholding and gainsharing;
• Better workplace relations, including more modern industrial relations, that reflect the speed of change, a move to problem solving, the need to avoid conflict and a deepening of partnership in the workplace.

Bringing about these changes will require a remodelling and repositioning of social partnership as we have known it in this country to date. It will require a recognition that the introduction of work organisation and production and service delivery methods that depend on training, motivation, flexibility and continuous improvement requires a high trust environment with management, employees and unions acting as partners in the enterprise. This should be seen as a key part of the next stage of Ireland’s development strategy.

The National Centre for Partnership and Performance will work closely with employers, employees, unions, state agencies and government to put these changes at the heart of national and workplace policies and to develop the workplace of the future. “A workplace which is flexible and productive; which engages our intelligence, commitment and energy; which balances working with living; which ensures high standards of public service and which equitably rewards all of those contributing to its success.”

Peter Cassels
Executive Chairman

“A workplace which is flexible and productive; which engages our intelligence, commitment and energy; which balances working with living; which ensures high standards of public service and which equitably rewards all of those contributing to its success.”

The Centre held detailed discussions with over fifty organisations across the private and public sectors. In addition, through the circulation of its Strategic Planning Discussion Document, views were sought from a wide range of organisations and individuals. We would like to thank those organisations that participated in the consultation process and the many individuals and organisations that responded to the issues raised in the discussion document.

The emerging challenges

What has emerged from this process is an ambitious and dynamic plan, which will stretch all concerned but which is appropriate in light of the challenges ahead and the concerns and expectations of those who participated in the consultations. In reflecting the main concerns, seven key challenges have been identified which are pre-eminent in articulating its vision, and guiding the direction of its work.

These key challenges are as follows:

Repositioning and mainstreaming partnership

The Centre will undertake the challenge of ‘mainstreaming’ partnership, linking it to organisational change and to the core operations of businesses and public service organisations.

Providing leadership

The Centre will adopt a path-finding role, to provide leadership and to develop a vision of the future of work, employment and workplace relations in the context of Ireland’s economic circumstances and prospects.

Such a vision can provide a coherent intellectual and policy framework to guide public policy in areas of competitiveness, work, employment and workplace relations.

Making partnership practical

The Centre will be both visionary and practical. It will aim to influence and support developments on the ground in significant ways.

Strategic focus

The Centre will seek to ‘steer’ rather than to ‘row’. Its primary emphasis will be strategic rather than operational. It will be required to lead the way in identifying priorities, in developing programmes to assist those directly involved in promoting partnership and improving performance, and in providing guidance and resources for significant partnership initiatives.

Highlighting workplace partnership

The Centre will continuously and emphatically highlight its role in deepening partnership and driving organisational change and improvement in the workplace and in the enterprise. It will be independent, reaching beyond the institutions and constituents of social partnership and encompassing areas of business and employment across the whole economy.

Evidence-based advocacy

The Centre will engage in evidence-based and experience-based advocacy of partnership and its role in improving performance and delivering mutual gains. Research will be independent and rigorous and geared towards assessing the situation with respect to partnership, as it exists.

Supporting multiple models

The Centre will support many different models of partnership where these can be shown to contribute to performance and the achievement of mutual gains on the basis of evidence and experience.

Strategic Priorities

The Centre has identified six strategic priorities which are consistent with these key challenges and which will guide its work and operational programme. These are summarised below, together with examples of specific and practical actions, which will commit the Centre to operationalise these priorities.

Deliberation

The Centre will deliberate on key issues relevant to partnership in firms and workplaces, with a view to influencing public policy and practice in ways that deepen partnership and widen its appeal. An important priority will be to strengthen the links between workplace partnership, organisational change and capability, and the quality of working life. In this regard, work has already begun on the process of developing guidelines to assist companies in embarking and successfully putting in place partnership arrangements. Following the development of these initial guidelines, the Centre will develop different models and approaches to organisational change through partnership and will publish models of best practice in the autumn of this year.

Other priorities are new reward systems and the transposition of the EU Information and Communication Directive.

A Strategy for Change and Innovation 2002–2005

Following an extensive process of consultation and analysis the National Centre for Partnership and Performance recently published a strategy statement and operational plan outlining priorities for the three years 2002–2005. As a new organisation, this process has been vitally important in helping to define clearly the role of the Centre, to articulate a new and exciting vision and to lay down some significant signposts for the journey ahead.
The Centre will prepare and develop a strategy for change and innovation. In providing support for partnership and change, the Centre will be able to play a strategic facilitation role in circumstances deemed to be of national significance, where partnership initiatives affect the economy as a whole, the workplace and workplace relations through partnership. A dissemination and communication strategy is currently being developed, aimed at ensuring accurate and timely information dissemination and enabling the Centre to share its training with organisations and key stakeholders.

An important aspect of the communication strategy is the development of the Centre’s website. The website will include links to other websites, organisations and multiple cases of best practice in different sectors and industries.

An Annual Workplace Review and Outlook will be published by the Centre, focusing on issues and developments in the workplace. The aim of this review is to highlight partnership developments and progress in organisational change and to provide a platform for discussion on models of work, employment and better workplace relations.

Auditing and reviewing The Centre will develop a programme aimed at the provision of an auditing and review facility for ongoing partnership initiatives. This will identify an appropriate methodology for the parties to partnership to assess its contribution and effects. An initial priority is to develop a methodology for benchmarking partnership initiatives, projects and training at organisational and national levels.

Collaboration
The Centre’s strategic plan and operational programme as set out are ambitious and will require co-operation from other leading agencies and organisations that have previously been driving change in the workplace. The Centre will work closely with the Social Partners and will develop opportunities for collaboration with Forfás and its major agencies, IDA and Enterprise Ireland, and FAS. The Centre will link with the Labour Relations Commission, the Labour Court and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment with a view to analysing trends in workplace relations, work, employment and human resource management. It will also collaborate with the Strategic Management Initiative with a view to promoting the mainstreaming of partnership in core programmes of public service modernisation in central government departments and in local government, health and education.

Joint ventures will also be undertaken with a wide range of cognate agencies. Planning has already begun on particular initiatives and projects with some of the following, Local Authority National Partnership Action Group (LANPAG), the Health Service Partnership Forum, the Equality Authority, The Social Partners, The Health and Safety Authority, and key organisations involved in the training and consulting sector.

In summary, the strategy sets out a framework within which the Centre will work in collaboration with many organisations and agencies in supporting and facilitating organisational change, based on partnership, and bringing about improved performance and mutual gains. It is the culmination of an intensive process of analysis, consultation and deliberation and represents a consensus approach to the way forward for the National Centre for Partnership and Performance.

Lucy Fallon-Byrne Director

Providing Evidence-based Advocacy
Within the context of over a decade of successful national level social partnership, a consensus has gradually emerged amongst the political parties and social partners regarding the appropriateness of extending partnership-style arrangements to the level of individual workplaces and enterprises.

Initially, there will be a strong emphasis on identifying, documenting and analysing the experimentation that has occurred with regards to innovative working practices, and forms of work organisation associated with more co-operative modes of employment relations. It is the Centre’s intention that this survey should be economy-wide, encompassing public and private sector organisations, indigenous and multi-national foreign-owned companies, large businesses and SME’s, manufacturing, financial and service industries and companies operating in different commercial circumstances.

Secondly, this analysis will be augmented by a series of in-depth case studies of best practice projects and initiatives, in different workplace settings, that clearly demonstrate the tangible advantages of engaging in partnership style arrangements. This case study approach does not seek to develop the definitive model of workplace partnership, but rather, aims to identify the range of shared principles, practices and outputs that will facilitate public and private sector organisations engaging in organisational change through co-operation and collaboration and, in so doing, enhance performance and deliver mutual gains.

In particular, it will be important to identify the range of factors that facilitate the translation of the partnership process from the periphery to the centre of business activity within public and private sector organisations.

It is intended that this activity will generate a rich repository of information on partnerships and associated best practices that will provide advice and support to companies, unions and employee groupings seeking to initiate or develop further partnership initiatives. The Centre will make this information available through a range of media, including a web site, regular bulletins, an annual review and policy papers.

In addition, the Centre will monitor developments in the workplace, to provide regular snapshots of the ‘world of work’ and generate additional examples of best practice projects and initiatives. In this context we would invite suggestions in relation to interesting partnership and/or participatory projects from either the public or private sectors. These can be forwarded to Cathal O’Regan at cosopheran@eircom.net or Damian Thomas at ncdpm@eircom.net.
### Changing Vision Into Reality: The Centre’s Support Structures

**How We Work**

The strategy and agenda of the Centre are ambitious and will need to be supported by key organisations and actors in the areas of partnership and performance. Much of the Centre’s success will depend on collaboration with other agencies and groups and the support, experience and wisdom of key champions of partnership will be important.

The National Council, the Centre’s principal forum for deliberation and discussion, proposes to play a role in providing structures to encourage the maximum levels of co-ordination between these agencies and groups. The Council support structures will also play an important role in achieving the Centre’s goals of advocacy and dissemination of best practice.

The National Council will establish two support structures, the National Forum on Participation and Change and the National Research Advisory Panel.

In addition, the Centre will establish a number of networks and project teams to provide support in the implementation of its operational programme. Initially, it is envisaged that the Centre will establish a national network of trainers and facilitators and a network of its strategic alliance partners.

| 1 | National Council and Executive | Chaired by Peter Cassells, the seventeen-member National Council is the Centre’s principal forum for discussion and deliberation on key strategic issues relating to partnership and performance. The Council, made up of representatives of IBEC, ICTU, government departments and representatives of the academic and industrial sectors, will provide a supportive national framework to deepen partnership and build organisational capability and increased flexibility at enterprise and workplace levels. Working with Peter are Lucy Fallon-Byrne, Centre Director, and an executive team. The team is co-ordinating a range of activities, including research and strategy, innovation and change, training and facilitation and administration, in co-operation with the Centre’s Council and other support structures. |
| 2 | National Forum on Participation and Organisational Change | The Forum on Participation and Organisational Change will offer an important opportunity for organisations, grappling with the role of partnership in affecting change, to share ideas and experience. The Forum will comprise government departments and public service national bodies, partnership organisations such as LANPAG and the Health Sector Partnership and private sector representatives. The Forum will offer a clearly delineated space for deliberation on partnership and organisational change and will facilitate shared experiences across sectors and industries. The Forum will assist the Centre to map out its vision of partnership and change, as well as its vision of the workplace of the future. |
| 3 | National Research Advisory Panel | The national Research Advisory Panel will advise the Centre on its research programmes and activities; provide a national network setting for the sharing of research experience and findings, and provide a forum for the widespread dissemination of research findings. The panel will comprise researchers from 3rd level institutes, business organisations, trade unions and industrial policy agencies, and will be representative of the wide range of expertise that exists in Ireland in the organisational development, industrial relations, change management and partnership fields. |
| 4 | Network of Strategic Alliance Partners | Much of the Centre’s success will depend on collaboration with other agencies and groups, and on supporting co-ordination between agencies concerned with workplace issues. The Network of Strategic Alliance Partners creates clearly focused links with agencies concerned with workplace issues in Ireland. The Network will facilitate discussion and co-ordination across agencies concerned with organisational change, helping to link partnership with organisational change. Network members include the industrial policy development agencies, key government departments and the industrial relations community, as well as business and trade union representatives. |
| 5 | Network of Trainers and Facilitators | The trainers network will create a space for public and private sector partnership training providers to meet and exchange experiences and ideas. The network will assist the Centre to develop and implement a training strategy for partnership and will encourage the development and dissemination of best practice in training for partnership. It will include trainers and facilitators from the public sector, IBEC and ICTU and private sector trainers and consultants. |
The Case for Enterprise Partnership

Research, and in particular action research, is required to establish a clear and strong business case for partnership and to market this case to all those involved in organisational change. In this regard, research at the Centre will focus on what is meant by partnership in the workplace and its role in the process of organisational change — for example, how are diverse interests and conflicts managed; how are roles and responsibilities changing; and what systematic support is the organisation providing; and in the final analysis, what is the impact on the performance of the organisation?

Benefits of Partnership

John O’Dowd’s ongoing research work — based on a survey of 88 companies — provides clear evidence that enterprise partnership in Ireland is effective. Workforce productivity improved in just over 50% of companies, and 65% reported that business performance improved. Also evident in this work that a limited number of specific companies (10–12%) of the sample may be achieving very high levels of improvement.

International research, in particular the work at the Involvement and Participation Association (IPA)/ Industrial Society, shows that many of these improvements are focused on in a significant cross section of UK industry. In particular, those firms where trust and direct participation increase to a high level, all partners experience the improvements outlined in Table 1. A snapshot of international research illustrates the nature of these gains.

Firstly, John Purcell at the University of Bath found, in a study of the clothing industry, that modular production (i.e. sitting around in horseshoe format — chatting, sharing shortcuts etc.) improved performance by 25–30% and also reduced order shipping times (in this case from three weeks to around three days). Secondly, in a study of 700 private companies in Sweden, research shows that organisations using continuous learning and task delegation achieved labour productivity that was 29–60% higher than that found in other organisations.

For example, Managing Best Practice Series, Number 87, Managing Partnerships, The Industrial Society, UK 2001. This includes the following research:
- John O’Dowd Workplace Research and Policy Development, National Co-ordinator Research and Policy Development
- Enterprise partnership delivers mutual gains for those workplaces, for various reasons, including the following:
  - Higher levels of employee flexibility
  - Acceptance that change is inevitable
  - Greater commitment
  - More and better quality suggestions from the ‘coalface’
  - Increased opportunities to exercise autonomy and to participate directly in decision-making
  - Greater emphasis on problem solving and innovation

Conclusions: Making Progress with Partnership

Organisations are in a new competitive era with transnational competition and increased and relentless pressure to improve productivity. In this environment it is unlikely that even the largest organisation, public or private, can rely on the creative efforts of a limited number of strategists. Instead, the pace of change and the international nature of competition suggests that organisations must create the conditions by which those involved in change are given an opportunity to influence decision-making within the organisation.

Enterprise partnership is in its broadest sense this type of local collaborative approach to decision-making. It suggests that the consequences of, for example, international restructuring in the private sector, or a new customer service initiative in the public sector, affect both management and workers.

It accepts that it is in the common interest of both to sustain organisation-wide competitiveness and thus decision-making can draw on all affected parties in developing innovative responses.

The challenge for research and policy development is to build a concrete, evidence-based case for this and further to effectively market this case to employees, their representatives and employers.

Making the case means working to establish what partnership means in the workplace, to crystallise it as an idea and make its concrete benefits clear. The development and implementation of partnership raises difficult problems in every specific case. The task for research and policy development is to bring about greater consensus and learning between cases. The Centre will develop lessons based upon an extensive program of action research and comparative examination of national and international practice. This will include studies focused on building organisational capability, modernisation and organisational change in the private and public sector organisations. The objective is to firmly establish the benefits for all those involved.

Marketing partnership means distributing these lessons widely and innovatively to practitioners. It means that greater discussion about partnership and what it offers to organisations comes about amongst key audiences – researchers and academics in the field, trade union bodies, industrial policy makers and other influential groups. The challenge for the Centre is to establish itself as an authoritative voice that will foster deliberation among these groups in relation to the competitive and social potential of partnership in the workplace of the future.

Larry O’Connell
National Co-ordinator
Research and Policy Development
To date, an impressive body of training and educational activity has been delivered to Irish enterprise and the public sector by a range of organisations concerned with the promotion of partnership. In addition to activities undertaken by the former National Centre for Partnership and the Irish Productivity Centre, the EU-funded ADAPT initiative facilitated organisations including IBEC, ICTU, SIPTU and Apple Computers to map out new pathways towards meaningful workplace partnership.

Learning materials such as the Partnership in Action at Enterprise Level programme, IBEC/AFTP Working in Partnership modules and SIPTU’s Mind your own Business series have contributed much to an increased understanding of what partnership entails and to an improved appreciation of how workplace partnership can facilitate organisational change.

Working within the context of this vibrant learning community, the Centre proposes to outline and implement a national training strategy in support of partnership including the management of change. The strategy will be primarily aimed at further developing the skills and competencies of those directly involved in introducing and managing partnership initiatives and those involved in facilitating such initiatives. In consultation with those working within and alongside public and private sector organisations the Centre will propose a vision and subsequent methodology of partnership facilitation within which learning can take place at a number of levels. These will be closely aligned to the strategic aims of the Centre itself and will identify existing gaps and potential synergies in current training provision.

The development of innovative learning materials will be central to the Centre’s strategy. In addition, the Centre will steer the development of evaluation and accreditation standards and processes within the partnership learning community. Work-based learning is critical to the successful implementation of partnership at the level of the firm, but business education also has an important role to play in the promotion of partnership as a key driver of business performance. The Centre will address the challenge of integrating partnership into second and third level business studies’ curricula and into management development courses.

In addition, the Centre will facilitate deliberation among the training and facilitation community by establishing a practitioners’ network to compare experiences, jointly consider challenges and develop effective peer-support structures. The strategy framework published recently by the Labour Relations Commission along with this strategy clearly identify that Irish workplaces are facing a very significant period of modernisation and change. We are committed, in particular through our advisory service, to working closely with the National Centre for Partnership and Performance in developing models of partnership intervention and support that should help to improve the management of change.

Mr Brian Patterson, Chairperson, National Competitiveness Council

The past ten years have seen very significant improvements in the capabilities and performance of Irish owned firms in terms of innovation and internationalisation. These are the critical factors driving our export focused indigenous business sector. To sustain these improvements, many indigenous firms are experimenting with new ‘high-performance’ work practices, such as team-working, continuous improvement, gain-sharing and labour flexibility and the Centre is on the right track in highlighting these as priorities for the future.

Mr Dan Flinter, Chief Executive, Enterprise Ireland

The key issue for all of us now is competitiveness. Improvements in living standards must be underpinned by increases in productivity, higher skills and a commitment to continuous change. IBEC looks forward to working with the National Centre for Partnership and Performance to achieve this.

Turlough O’Sullivan, Director-General, IBEC

The decision of the National Centre for Partnership and Performance to seek to reposition partnership around key national strategic priorities is an important development and, in that context, I was delighted to be asked to chair the Centre’s National Research Advisory Panel.

Bill Roche, Professor of Industrial Relations and Human Resources, University College Dublin

Only continuous organisational improvement and human resource development will help us to achieve the ambitious goals set by the programme of modernisation of the public service and I look forward to the support of the National Centre for Partnership and Performance can give us to achieve this.

Mr Dermot McCarthy, Secretary General, Dept of the Taoiseach

In the Competitiveness Challenge 2000, we point out that maintaining and improving competitiveness must become once again a primary national concern and productivity growth is the only unconstrained basis for raising per capita incomes. I am delighted to see, therefore, that the National Centre for Partnership and Performance will be promoting enterprise-level partnership, which research has shown to be conducive to improved productivity performance.

Mr Brian Patterson, Chairperson, National Competitiveness Council

The major national competitive imperative is for business to move up the value chain, undertake higher levels of research and development and compete, wherever possible, primarily on the basis of productivity, quality, innovation and high skill. This imperative now underlies the policy of the IDA towards the FDI sector, I welcome, therefore, the strong emphasis being placed by the Centre on the development of new and more flexible forms of work organisation that improve productivity and speed up adaptation to change.

Mr Sean Dorgan, Chief Executive, IDA