

7

Issue 7 Summer 2006

Update

The Bulletin of The National Centre for Partnership and Performance

Contents

Page 1

Why do we need a new National Workplace Strategy?
Peter Cassells

Page 3

The NCPP and the National Workplace Strategy: A vision for the future workplace
Lucy Fallon-Byrne

Page 5

Enabling workplace change and innovation – a new agenda for workplace partnership
Damian Thomas

Page 8

National Workplace Strategy: driving workplace change
Tony Killeen, T.D.

Page 10

New Council appointed

Page 12

Workplace Change and Innovation in Ireland's Local Government Sector
Cathal O'Regan

Page 15

Five ways to make your workplace innovative
Larry O'Connell

Page 18

Building Learning Organisations through Networking
Edna Jordan

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Why do we need a new National Workplace Strategy?

To sustain our economic and social success, we have as a country identified the need to invest in infrastructure, promote R&D and improve the quality of public services. There has, however, been little focus on building the capacity of employers and unions to bring about change in our workplaces and enhance the quality of working life. These are the reasons why we need to implement a new integrated National Workplace Strategy.

We know that our prosperity and social achievements of the past decade are now in a critical period of transition. We have accepted that skills and learning in all areas must move up one step. We know that we require a more efficient and effective delivery of public services, especially in areas such as health, transport and education.

This transition will present significant challenges for all organisations, employees and unions in both the private and public sector. To prepare

for these challenges, the Forum on the Workplace of the Future has outlined a new integrated National Workplace Strategy. The purpose of this Strategy is to co-ordinate the approach of all government departments and agencies to workplace development and to support employers and unions to promote change through partnership. Its implementation is being overseen by a high-level implementation group chaired by Minister of State Tony Killeen, T.D.

“The purpose of this Strategy is to co-ordinate the approach of all government departments and agencies to workplace development and to support employers and unions to promote change through partnership.”

The National Workplace Strategy identifies a range of workplace practices that need to be improved, including:

- *Leadership and the capacity for change*: we need to build the capabilities of managers, employees and unions in the public and private sector to proactively introduce and manage change.
- *Upskilling and workplace learning*: to maintain competitiveness in all sectors and ensure that workers are employable, we need to remove barriers to work-related learning and training. This is especially true in the case of workers in lower skilled jobs and those with narrow skills sets in shrinking areas of the economy.
- *Promoting diversity and work-life balance*: for business benefits and employee well-being, diversity and work-life balance need to be promoted as an integral part of every organisation’s culture and management.
- *Practical approaches to partnership*: workplace partnership needs to be revitalised and refocused as the mechanism for tackling these challenges.

We should not be afraid of these challenges nor of the transition we are seeking to make as a country. The Forum on the Workplace of the Future concluded that achievement of the goals set out in the National Workplace Strategy will provide the basis for competitive enterprise, high quality public services, broad access to employment opportunities and a good quality working life for all employees. By working together to improve our capacity for change and the quality of working life, we have the opportunity to be one of the first countries in the world to embrace the so-called knowledge economy and knowledge society.

*Peter Cassells, Chairperson,
National Centre for Partnership
and Performance*

The NCPP and the National Workplace Strategy: A vision for the future workplace

The strategic focus of the NCPP over the next three years is to realise the vision of the future workplace as set out in the Government's National Workplace Strategy. This vision captures the need to sustain and increase our competitive position internationally, while fully acknowledging the importance of involving and supporting the well-being of all our workers.

The National Workplace Strategy is the first dedicated national programme designed to support workplace and workforce development and modernisation and has been developed by government in consultation with the social partners.

The vision of the workplace, as outlined in this new strategy, is based on nine critical characteristics. To sustain and deliver increased competitiveness, our workplaces need to be:

- agile
- customer-centred
- knowledge-intensive
- networked and
- highly productive (Table 1).

However, in a modern society, highly innovative, dynamic knowledge-based workplaces need to be alert

and responsive to the needs of their employees. The vision specifies therefore, that workplaces will be:

- responsive to employees needs
- involved and participatory
- continually learning and
- proactively diverse.

Our workers are our future as we have chosen to move to high value-added activities and services to actively compete at the top end of the global marketplace. Future developments in our workplaces and the strategy of the NCPP are guided by this twin-track approach to change and innovation:

- Building innovative, agile and highly productive organisations and
- Valuing employees, fostering involvement and responding to their increasingly diverse needs.

“...the challenge now is to realise the vision of the workplace as set out in the National Workplace Strategy.”

TABLE 1 Workplace of the future	
Characteristics	Our employees say...
Agile	We are committed to and ready for change
Customer centred	Our customers needs are paramount
Knowledge intensive	We search for and harness all sources of knowledge
Responsive to employee needs	This is a great place to work for all of us
Networked	We work collaboratively and build relationships
Highly productive	We continuously improve our ways of working
Involved and participatory	Everyone has a say and all voices and ideas are valued
Continually learning	We are supported and expected to learn and develop
Proactively diverse	We are better because we are diverse

The NCPP’s mission will be to lead and support transformation in Irish workplaces, through partnership, by building commitment to this new vision and by being proactive in the implementation of the National Workplace Strategy.

The mission of the NCPP will be fulfilled through five inter-related programmes of activity as outlined in the strategy framework (Figure 1).

1. Partnership – enabling change

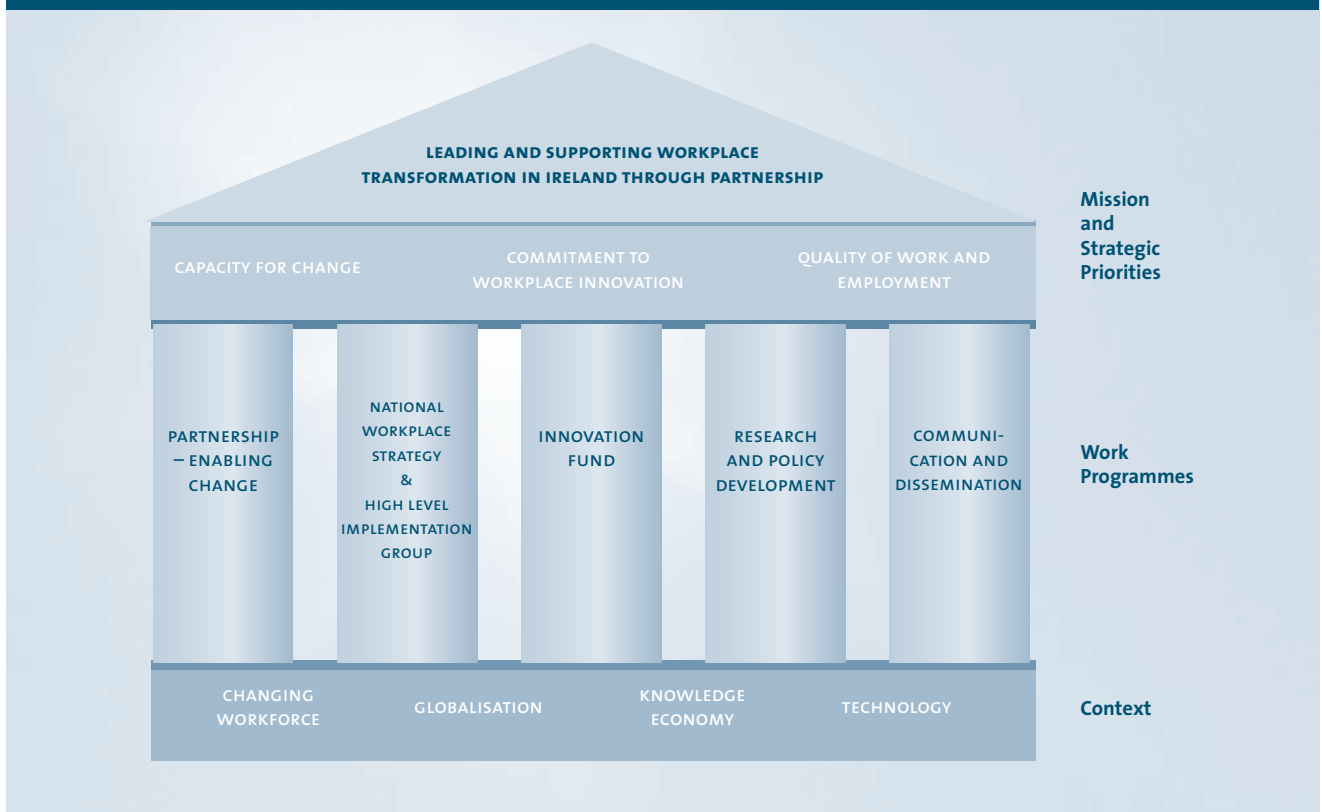
The vision of the workplace of the future creates a new and challenging context in which to consider the further development of partnership. In many respects, it can be said that this guiding vision maps out a new and expanded role for workplace partnership. It is a new and holistic approach, which incorporates the

changing needs of the workplace and the workforce in areas such as learning, diversity and equality, flexible working and work-life balance as well as the need to be informed, consulted and continuously involved. This next phase of the development of partnership will focus less on structures and processes and more on outcomes and benefits for the organisation as well as the needs of workers as articulated in the vision of the workplace of the future.

2. National Workplace Strategy and the HLIIG

The High-Level Implementation Group (HLIG) was established in June 2005 to oversee the implementation of the National Workplace Strategy. Over the next three years, the NCPP will provide professional and executive support for the work of the HLIIG.

FIGURE 1 NCPP Strategic Overview 2006–2009



The NCPP is also responsible for co-ordinating each of the five main areas in the National Workplace Strategy and is directly responsible for the implementation of nine of its recommendations.

3. Workplace Innovation Fund

The National Workplace Strategy recommends the establishment of a three year workplace innovation fund under the aegis of the Council of the NCPP. This new Workplace Innovation Fund will be used to support and mainstream new ideas and best practice models of workplace innovation.

4. Research and policy development

Research and policy development will continue to underpin the work of the NCPP across all five of its work programmes. Research at the NCPP is designed to build policy

from a sound and rigorous evidence-base and to support the development of workplace innovation. The NCPP will continue to co-ordinate and champion workplace innovation as a research theme within the policy and research communities.

5. Communication and dissemination

The communication and dissemination programme will promote the work of the NCPP and the High Level Implementation Group. It will develop and implement advocacy and information campaigns on the key issues, policies and ideas

of the National Workplace Strategy. It will also develop a pro-active PR strategy to improve how information and messages associated with this work are presented.

Since its establishment in 2001, the NCPP has engaged in a wide range of activities to help improve performance in the workplace and to embed-partnership style approaches to change. However, a lot has changed in the intervening years and the context for the new strategy has also changed. The challenge now is to realise the vision of the workplace as agreed at the Forum and to ensure that the ambitious and co-ordinated approach to workplace development as outlined in the National Workplace Strategy is fully implemented.

Lucy Fallon-Byrne, Director, National Centre for Partnership and Performance

Enabling workplace change and innovation – a new agenda for workplace partnership

Following the work of the Forum on the Workplace of the Future, there is an emerging consensus that the quality of the workforce and the levels of workplace change and innovation are critically important to Ireland’s ongoing transition to a higher skilled, dynamic and knowledge-based economy.

The Government has now positioned workplace development at the very centre of the policy agenda through the National Workplace Strategy. The Strategy recognises the necessity of developing more effective partnership-style approaches to stimulate workplace change and innovation across the whole economy.

A key theme of the National Workplace Strategy is that making use of high-involvement, high-

participation work practices benefits both employers and employees through increased innovation, higher productivity and an enhanced quality of working life. The drive to achieve a dynamic, knowledge-based economy reaffirms the potential of workplace partnership to act as an effective response to the challenges facing all workplaces in Ireland.

To fulfil its potential, the principles and practices of workplace partnership need to be harnessed

“The further development of workplace partnership must be clearly aligned with the goals of the National Workplace Strategy.”

TABLE 2 Proposed programme of action to further develop workplace partnership

Private sector initiatives	
Consultative process	Engage with summit players and partnership practitioners to identify the key steps that must be undertaken to deepen partnership.
The Irish Workplace Innovation Fund	Target support to promote innovation, organisational change and lifelong learning at the workplace level, in a manner that simultaneously improves organisational performance and the experience of employees.
Joint initiatives	Develop joint initiatives focused on progressing collaborative and innovative solutions to challenges posed by the increased pace of workplace change.
Sectoral partnership projects	Initiate sector-based projects focused on deepening partnership within selected sectors and developing partnership-based solutions to sector-specific issues.
Capacity building for partnership	<i>Management:</i> Promote the NCPP's Competency Framework as a leading edge and innovative tool for supporting the development of a more participatory managerial culture.
	<i>Trade unions:</i> develop a targeted initiative focused on enhancing union capacity for engaging in partnership. In particular this activity would focus on building an active alliance of partnership champions within the trade union movement.
Advocacy and mainstreaming	Focus advocacy activity on partnership as an enabler of workplace change and innovation and incorporate it as part of a broader programme of communication and dissemination associated with the National Workplace Strategy.
Information and consultation	Promote the capacity of workplace partnership to actively assist both the implementation of the national legislation at the organisational level and also enhance current practice in relation to informing and consulting with employees.

“The debate on how to progress workplace partnership needs to focus on how it can contribute to fostering the higher levels of employee engagement and participation that are required in a knowledge-based economy.”

through closer integration between business priorities, staff needs and industrial relations structures. This creates an environment where a partnership approach becomes the way business is done at all levels within an organisation.

Ultimately for partnership to survive and flourish, it must be increasingly seen as an effective driver of workplace change and innovation that delivers for all parties concerned.

The debate on how to progress workplace partnership needs to focus on how it can contribute to fostering the higher levels of employee engagement and participation that are required in a knowledge-based economy.

Similarly, the establishment of both formal and informal partnership structures must be concerned with encouraging a more collaborative problem-solving culture within organisations. In such a culture, the management style will be open and participative, the contribution

of employees at all levels will be valued, and new ideas will be welcomed and rewarded. To develop this type of culture it will be necessary to cultivate new approaches to organisation and people-management, new forms of leadership, and new managerial competencies.

Trade unions have a critical role to play in supporting change and encouraging innovation. To do this they need to be more proactive in terms of engaging with employers to resolve workplace issues and enhance performance. Significantly, an NCPP/ESRI survey of employees' views and experiences found that union members favour such a proactive participatory approach.¹ Also, they want unions to develop a more integrative bargaining agenda, focusing more on flexible working and work-related learning and training. Workplace partnership can facilitate unions in adopting such co-operative strategies and in pursuing a broader based bargaining agenda capable of meeting their members' diverse needs.

Developing partnership-style arrangements could also tap into the willingness of employees to engage with change – an attribute that is currently under-utilised. In particular, such arrangements could stimulate the evolution of more open and collaborative working relationships capable of harnessing the talents of all employees in resolving complex organisational problems.

The further development of workplace partnership must be clearly aligned with the goals of the National Workplace Strategy. Although the capacity of workplace partnership to contribute to the development of dynamic, high performing, and participatory workplaces is clearly recognised, translating this consensus into practical action is a challenge. In part what is required is a new consensus among government and the social partners that focuses on the need to stimulate workplace change and innovation through a partnership approach. This consensus must be underpinned by an integrated action capable of supporting the further development of workplace partnership across all sectors of the economy.

The NCPP's new strategy for 2006–2009 has identified "Partnership – Enabling Change" as one of its five inter-related programmes of activity. Table 2 outlines a proposed set of practical measures for operationalising this programme area. In particular this integrated set of actions is designed to enhance the capacity of workplace partnership's capacity to contribute to the strategic goal of modernising our public and private sector workplaces in a manner that delivers for both the economy and broader society.

*Dr. Damian Thomas
National Centre for Partnership
and Performance*

"In part what is required is a new consensus among government and the social partners that focuses on the need to stimulate workplace change and innovation through a partnership approach."

1. NCPP/ESRI (2004) *The Changing Workplace: A Survey of Employees' Views and Experiences*

National Workplace Strategy: driving workplace change

Message from Mr. Tony Killeen T.D.,
Minister for Labour Affairs at the Department
of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and
Chair of the National Workplace Strategy
High Level Implementation Group

On an almost daily basis, we are reminded of the rapidly changing nature of the Irish economy. Changing industrial realities and new labour force demographics have profound implications for the workplaces that we operate in. It is important that we have a focus on the workplace because this is where our capacity to adapt to the pace of change will be tested. The challenge for all of us – policy makers, service providers, employers, trade unions, managers and workers, is to manage these changes effectively.

Our ability to manage change in the workplace will be crucial to the future of the Irish economy. Over the coming years, our national competitiveness, our productivity, our health and well-being as employees, and the extent to which we can sustain and benefit from our economic growth will be determined by the decisions that we make within the workplace.

The National Workplace Strategy highlights what needs to be done at a policy level and within individual places of employment. While the Strategy presents a complex challenge, we have every reason to be optimistic about our ability to

succeed. Our experiences of the national social partnership process and the recent Forum on the Workplace of the Future remind us of how well we can work together in developing innovative responses to complex problems.

“It is important that we have a focus on the workplace, because this is where our capacity to adapt to the pace of change will be tested.”

As Chair of the High Level Implementation Group, I can report that significant progress has already been made on a number of important issues. The first Status Report, issued in February 2006, shows that government and the social partners are now collaborating to an unprecedented extent. This collaboration, together with other developments expected over the coming months, can only augur well for our journey towards becoming a more innovative, knowledge-based economy.

New Council appointed

The Taoiseach has appointed a new Council to take the NCPP forward over the next three years. With representatives from government, trade unions and employers along with individual members, the Council represents an excellent mix of experience and talent to advance the NCPP's new three-year strategy.



Peter Cassells, former general secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, is the new chairperson of the NCPP Council. He was Executive Chair of the first NCPP Council and chaired the inaugural sessions of the Forum on the Workplace of the Future. He has been involved in the negotiation of five national partnership programmes.



John Walsh is Assistant Secretary at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.



Philip Kelly is Assistant Secretary in charge of public service modernisation and social partnership (pay and industrial relations) in the Taoiseach's Department.



Brendan McGinty is Director of Industrial Relations and Human Resources with the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC). He was chief negotiator for IBEC in concluding the national partnership agreement *Sustaining Progress* and is centrally involved in the negotiations on a successor to that agreement.



Professor Joyce O'Connor is President of the National College of Ireland. She has published widely on education and access issues, entrepreneurship, women in business, innovation and enterprise, drinking and smoking behaviours and the elderly.



Dr Catherine Kavanagh is a lecturer at UCC. She has published widely in the areas of compensation in the workplace, labour market policies, the skills and qualifications of workers, income distribution and inequality, measures of progress, and the effectiveness of public capital expenditure. Her current research interests are in the areas of migration and work in Ireland, and occupational and educational change in the Irish labour force.

Irene Canavan is HR Director at Arnotts.



Liam Doherty is currently acting as Project Director of the IBEC Alternative Dispute Resolution Skillnet. He is a Visiting Research Associate in Queens University, Belfast, where he is conducting research into alternative dispute resolution mechanisms in a variety of organisations in Ireland and internationally.



Edward Keenan is Director of Industrial Relations, Employment and Manpower Services with the Construction Industry Federation. He holds an MA in industrial relations and human resource management and has over twenty years experience in industrial relations and human resource management.



Jerry Shanahan has been a member of the executive council of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions for a number of years and has participated in the negotiation of the last three national agreements. He has a particular interest in employee involvement and participation.



Catherine Byrne is currently Deputy General Secretary of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO). She has a wide range of skills and expertise in educational, trade union and gender issues.



Fergus Whelan is an Industrial Officer with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions with special responsibility for industrial relations in the private sector.



Gerry McCormack is National Industrial Secretary at SIPTU with responsibility for the private sector. He worked as a miner in Tara Mines for 16 years where he was a shop steward.



Ciarán Connolly is Assistant Secretary at the Department of Finance with responsibility for pay and industrial relations in the public service. Over his career in the Civil Service he has worked in the areas of industrial relations, organisational development, EU structural funding and expenditure planning and control.



Dr Dorothy Butler Scally is an independent consultant working in the field of personal and professional development. She has contributed to the development of recruitment and selection procedures for senior managers and has acted as an independent chairperson of interview boards for senior management posts across the spectrum of the civil and public services.



Lucy Fallon-Byrne has been Director of the NCPP since 2001. She has an extensive background in strategic management and planning. Since its establishment she has provided strategic direction to the NCPP and has ensured the delivery of its extensive work programme. A major achievement for the NCPP has been the Forum on the Workplace of the Future and the development of a new National Workplace Strategy.

Workplace Change and Innovation in Ireland's Local Government Sector

The NCPP has published a new report that examines the pressures local government is subject to, and looks at how management, unions and employees in local authorities are playing a central role in enabling the sector to respond to these challenges.

The local government sector typifies the organisational challenges being experienced across the Irish economy. Driven by *Better Local Government* (1996) and the Local Government Act of 2001, the sector is in the throes of a highly significant change and modernisation programme. The key challenges for local authorities include engaging effectively with local democracy structures, enhancing customer service levels and improving organisational efficiencies.

The local authority is emerging as the *de facto* driver of an increasingly co-ordinated approach by public service providers to service planning, investment and delivery

“The case studies demonstrate that working in partnership allows the organisation to handle significant change effectively while delivering better outcomes for management, unions, employees and customers.”

into communities. How effectively local authorities can step into this role will depend on their capacity to bring about quite fundamental changes within their organisations. Such changes include the re-organisation of management and operational structures, the introduction of cutting-edge information and communication technologies, and significant integration and streamlining of financial and HR management systems.

The NCPP bases its report on four in-depth case studies of organisational change and innovation, in Meath, Donegal, South Dublin and Wexford county councils. The case

Case studies of organisational change and innovation

Donegal County Council undertook an unprecedented decentralisation programme.

Over a period of several years, management, unions and staff worked together to create new structures, facilities and services at the County Council. The business model of the County Council has now moved from an archaic and bureaucratic system to one where the public are served by a series of Public Service Centres located across the county. Working conditions and progression opportunities for the staff at Donegal County Council have substantially improved, and the Council has become a customer-centred organisation with a highly motivated and innovative workforce.

South Dublin County Council effected a root-and-branch redefinition of what is meant by quality customer service to the public.

The use of advanced information and communications technologies enables management and staff at South Dublin to monitor and respond to the needs of its customers. The public now have one point of contact with the council, no matter what their query might be. In tandem with this focus on the customer, South Dublin enjoys some highly successful initiatives that have benefited staff across the organisation.

At Meath County Council a large scale re-organisation was undertaken through a partnership process.

The changing demographics within Meath, and an expanding demand on a highly centralised council headquarters led Meath County Council, in partnership with its unions and staff, to undertake a full service decentralisation programme. Five new area offices were opened to provide state-of-the-art facilities for the public in the county.

Wexford County Council used a partnership approach to resolve a traditionally difficult issue

Thanks to an innovative partnership process management, unions and employees at Wexford County Council arrived at a negotiated agreement on the thorny issue of public private partnerships in record time. They agreed on the framework for the installation, maintenance and measuring of water metering to commercial customers in the county.

studies show strong evidence in the sector of the type of innovative workplace characteristics envisaged by the National Workplace Strategy. The studies highlight once again the success of the partnership approach in effectively tackling strategic and often contentious issues. Working collaboratively on core organisational change issues, management, unions and staff have brought about significantly improved customer service levels and organisational efficiencies, while at the same time enhancing the quality of employment and the working environment for staff.

The case studies provide models of good practice that are of relevance above and beyond the immediate confines of the local authority workplace.

Looking forward

There are strong indications that local government is successfully tackling change issues, but management, unions and staff must continue to deepen the partnership approach. A key challenge for all concerned will be to make the partnership process more robust by progressively testing its capacity to engage with more contentious and strategic issues. The publication by the Local Authority National Partnership Advisory Group (LANPAG) of a protocol for the sector,

Handling Significant Change through Partnership, is a key step in this direction.

Other important steps are being taken by LANPAG and the local authorities to mainstream many of the innovations that have been piloted over the last five years. Some of the examples of good practice profiled in the report are relevant to organisational change issues right across the public and private sectors and are likely to be the subject of increasing interest to government, employers and unions as they seek ways to implement the National Workplace Strategy.

Copies of “*Workplace Change and Innovation in Ireland's Local Government Sector – Partnership in Practice*” are available from www.ncpp.ie or by contacting 01 814 6300.

Cathal O'Regan
National Centre for Partnership and Performance

“A key challenge for all concerned will be to make the partnership process more robust by progressively testing its capacity to engage with more contentious and strategic issues”.

Five ways to make your workplace innovative

In the National Workplace Strategy greater commitment to workplace innovation is a key priority. So how do companies, policy makers, employers' groups and trade unions get people to think more creatively and innovatively about work? A Masterclass in late 2005 provided several illustrations and helped to identify five key lessons.

Five lessons from the Masterclass

1. If you want a good idea, get lots of ideas
2. If you want new ideas, let employees and customers have their say
3. If you want to find new ways of doing things, think partnership
4. If you want fresh ideas, challenge the existing culture
5. If you want innovative employees, have innovative managers

Lesson 1 **If you want a good idea, get lots of ideas**

An organisation which fails to immerse all of its employees, its customers and suppliers in the process of innovation and the search for new ideas is selling itself short. It is losing out on potential opportunities. The Masterclass heard that:

- At Nokia, building alliances and informal networks is more important than creating complex organisational structures and hierarchies. There is a culture of informality to encourage conversation and sharing of ideas with

all employees eating in the same canteen and a casual dress code.

- Irish companies acknowledge the importance of employees as sources of innovation. They are also making greater use of high performance work practices to create the right conditions for this type of employee contribution. However, there is evidence that many Irish companies are not tapping into the full potential that exists among the workforce. This is particularly true of smaller indigenous companies.

Lesson 2 **If you want new ideas, let employees and customers have their say**

Necessity is often seen as the mother of invention but what is needed is not always so easy to identify. In most cases, innovation arises through a process in which those with expert knowledge, for example employees and consumers, experiment with ideas, concepts and products. Many consumers' needs only become fully apparent as products and versions of products or services are introduced. Think of the iPod, SMART cars or MBT walking shoes.

The Masterclass illustrated that we need to open up possibilities and build platforms for new ideas to come through in each workplace. It was suggested that:

- Innovation should be an open rather than a closed activity. In a closed activity, bright people working in special conditions, for example in an R&D lab, are freed from market pressures to develop ideas which are passed along a pipeline to a passive customer. In the open system there are multiple sources of new ideas; people work in 'swarms' rather than in isolation. In this approach workers and consumers are innovators. Innovation is a collaborative process where knowledge is created through interaction, re-using and borrowing.

Lesson 3 **If you want to find new ways of doing things, think partnership**

Globalisation, growing competitive intensity and outsourcing are all critical aspects of the current business environment. In response,

business must find new ways to compete, innovate and improve performance.

Research presented at the Masterclass supported the role of partnership in the context of these challenges. Partnership was linked to innovative thinking and pinpointed as a key factor in predicting the use of high performance work practices. The Masterclass illustrated that mutual gain is no longer just a theory, it is a very real part of best practice in Ireland and internationally. The Masterclass showed that:

- In spite of very heavy outsourcing of manufacturing activity, the Danish textile industry now employs twice as many people as five years ago and at twice the hourly wage rate.
- The key to its success has been an early and joint management-union acceptance of the fundamental need for reform. Employers, employees and unions worked in partnership to develop solutions. Significant investment took place in relation to education and re-training to allow workers to develop new competencies in areas such as design and marketing.
- Among the Top 1000 Irish companies, partnership is associated statistically with better employment security. It is also significantly associated with the adoption of workplace practices that are linked with high performance and innovation.

Lesson 4 **If you want fresh ideas, challenge the existing culture**

Workplace innovation is about a new mindset. It requires a culture where management and workers look sideways and borrow ideas, admit what they do not know, are encouraged to disagree, and unlearn some of what they know. There is, however, an underlying force summed up in the idea 'if it ain't broke don't fix it' that compels even very large and very successful organisations to resist change. The Masterclass highlighted the challenges but also the possibilities. It illustrated:

- That the draw of the status quo can be even harder to resist within the small, owner-operated companies that are so important within the Irish economy. Very often in the absence of a crisis it can be extremely difficult to create a momentum behind the need for a new culture.
- That it is possible to create this momentum has been demonstrated by dramatic change at Newbridge Cutlery. The skills of existing employees have been used to support a radical product and market diversification strategy that has seen the company develop a very successful jewellery business.
- The importance of our schools should not be underestimated in our efforts to change workplace culture. Problem solving, critical thinking, team building, communication and interpersonal skills, along with the ability to take risks and experiment, are the vital attributes that the innovative workplace of the future will require. We need to fundamentally re-think our approach to investment in education.

“An organisation which fails to immerse all of its employees, its customers and suppliers in the process of innovation and the search for new ideas, is selling itself short. It is losing out on potential opportunities.”

Getting started

Ask yourself...

- *Is innovation really important to what you do?*
- *Do you have a systematic process to support workplace innovation?*
- *Have you tried to innovate? If so have you been knocked back?*
- *Have you successfully introduced any innovations in your workplace in the last 12 months?*

Charles Leadbeater

Lesson 5

If you want innovative employees, have innovative managers

Ideas come from imagination and imagination is sparked by stories and metaphors. Telling stories, getting conversations started and facilitating creative discussions among people are critical for innovation. Traditionally managers have relied heavily on plans, spreadsheets and numbers rather than on stories and metaphors. The Masterclass helped to illustrate the need for improved top-down support. It highlighted that:

- The ability to inspire people to innovate requires improvements in management and leadership. It also requires improvements in training, performance management, and financial rewards and incentives.
- An innovation fund would help to promote workplace innovation and get stories into the public domain. This would facilitate the efforts of employers and trade unions to promote and develop workplace innovation.

- There is a need to look at innovative ways to reward employees. Just one in six Irish companies have employee financial involvement. Gain sharing mechanisms which allow employees to share in the gains that result from their contributions and ideas will be critical to the development of any sustainable process of workplace innovation.

Thanks to Tony Killeen, (Minister for Labour Affairs), Philip Kelly (Department of the Taoiseach), John Monks (ETUC), David Begg (ICTU), Catherine Byrne (INTO), Brendan McGinty (IBEC), Lucy Fallon-Byrne (NCP), James Guthrie (University of Kansas) and Charles Leadbeater (Consultant) for their thought-provoking contributions to the Masterclass.

*Dr. Larry O’Connell
National Centre for Partnership
and Performance*

Building Learning Organisations through Networking

...the capacity for organisational learning is one of the keys to innovation, competitiveness, employment growth and security.

(National Workplace Strategy)

How can organisations develop or improve the way they learn? How can learning be sustained in organisations? Answers to these questions can be found in a new NCPP report, *Building Learning Organisations through Networking*. It is the final report of a collaborative action research project with FÁS. The objective was to identify and promote effective approaches to organisational learning in public and private sector organisations in Ireland. Several strands of enquiry and research were combined including:

- An exploration of the academic literature on learning and the impact of network-led initiatives
- An in-depth survey of learning in sixteen Irish organisations
- A dynamic practitioner network which provided the basis for thirteen organisational case studies included in the report
- An action learning project undertaken by members of the network in their own organisations.

The establishment of the practitioner network was central to the success of the project and facilitated a new understanding and awareness of the potential of learning in the workplace.

One of the significant findings of the report is that learning must make a visible contribution to the organisation. It must play a part, for example, in improving efficiency and in attracting and retaining ‘good’ employees.

The report highlights how a focus on workplace learning can produce a wider range of solutions for organisational problems and can help to achieve a better balance between long-term effectiveness and short-term efficiency in the organisation. The project demonstrated that workplace learning is the key to developing individual potential and enabling people to both meet the demands of change in their workplace and contribute to their ongoing employability. The wide-ranging nature of informal

learning and the opportunities that it presents to influence a culture of learning throughout the organisation are also highlighted in the report.

“Organisational learning has the capacity to change the culture of the organisation.”

How can organisations develop or improve the way they learn?

The report identifies a number of key actions that support and improve the effectiveness of learning within organisations. These include:

- **Developing a communicative and collaborative environment**

Open and flexible communication is key to effective learning. Individual and organisational learning can be supported by fostering a more communicative and collaborative environment in

which individuals learn from each other. This type of communication is closely associated with strong teamwork and a willingness to share knowledge, expertise and information.

■ **Developing standards and links with accreditation bodies**

The development and implementation of a highly structured learning system is important in the support of learning. This is characterised among the network organisations by strong links with skill formation systems and validation bodies such as the FÁS Excellence through People (ETP) standard.

■ **Ensuring HR systems complement learning**

Learning must also be an integral part of HR systems. There is a close interplay between performance management systems and recruitment, selection and reward structures. All members of the organisation need to be aware of the priority attached to learning. It is essential that this message is reinforced in the range of systems developed to recruit, induct, promote and reward individuals.

■ **A systematic approach to learning**

Adopting a systematic approach to learning enables organisations to create a tangible link between strategy and the design and delivery of training and development.

How can learning be sustained in the workplace?

Through the learning experiences of the network participants, specific practice guidelines were developed. These include:

Fostering learning at work

- Make learning part of the business agenda and promote this awareness among the management team.
- Provide formal training in mentoring and coaching for managers and supervisors.
- Develop a management culture based on co-operation, communication and partnership between management and employees that promotes dialogue.
- Link, promote and prioritise learning through other HR systems, for example, recruitment, induction, performance management and development.
- Celebrate individual and organisational learning achievements.
- Be sure to provide a balance between internal and external, formal and informal learning opportunities when planning and budgeting for learning.

“Workplace learning encompasses much more than formal training.”

Managing learning at work

- Shift the focus from *training* to *learning*.
- Win the support of managers to ensure that learning translates into improvements in work practices.

- Establish formal internal ‘learning champions’ at various levels to promote learning initiatives.
- Promote learning and development as an integral part of everyone’s role and responsibilities.
- Identify ways of managing formal learning activities so that they fit with business needs.
- Make the learning process explicit and visible throughout the organisation by creating a distinctive brand identity for learning within the organisation, for example.

“Shift the focus from training to learning.”

Facilitating learning through sharing knowledge and information

- Establish regular meeting arrangements across different functional areas to facilitate and enhance shared learning opportunities.
- Apply action learning approaches using real problems as the focus of personal learning or education programmes.
- Design, implement and support mentoring and coaching systems.
- Experiment with new learning tools, including e-learning and learning sets.
- Provide a range of learning models including opportunities for certified and accredited formal workplace learning activities.

The report which includes case studies and analysis is available at www.ncpp.ie or by contacting 01 814 6300.

*Edna Jordan
National Centre for Partnership
and Performance*

Views of Council Members

“ To sustain our economic and social success, we must build our capacity for change in the workplace and enhance the quality of working life for all workers. To prepare for this challenge, a new integrated National Workplace Strategy has been finalised to co-ordinate our approach to workplace development and to promote change through partnership. As Chair of the NCPP I look forward to working closely with Government agencies, Congress and IBEC on the implementation of this Strategy. ”

Peter Cassells, Chairperson of NCPP Council

“ A key ingredient in the success of Ireland’s social partnership has been its capacity to respond to changing economic and social circumstances. The NCPP is helping to develop a shared understanding of the challenges as they arise within our workplaces and to bring forward new approaches and initiatives. ”

Philip Kelly, Assistant Secretary, Department of An Taoiseach

“ The NCPP has shown that partnership and other related HR innovations which take employees needs and ambitions into account can be a real source of productivity growth. The challenge over the next three years will be to encourage and support more companies, especially small businesses, to think about how they can customise partnership-type workplace innovations to improve productivity. ”

John Walsh, Assistant Secretary, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

“ Ireland is no longer a low-cost/low-wage economy and we must recognise that we cannot compete with some of the emerging economies on cost grounds alone. The growth of knowledge-intensive work will be one of the most important influences shaping work and workplaces in the coming years. The recommendations of the Forum on the Workplace of the Future represent an important milestone in charting the way forward for all of us to achieve what we want – a competitive economy that can create and sustain jobs in a workplace environment which expands access to opportunity and enhances the quality of working life. ”

Brendan McGinty, Director of Industrial Relations and Human Resources, IBEC

“ Our priority must be to work together to generate the conditions for an Irish economy that will be amongst the most competitive in the world, able both to create new jobs and to sustain the jobs we have. ”

Liam Doherty, Project Director, IBEC Dispute Resolution Skillnet

“ Subscribing to the notion of partnership is not enough. For effectiveness in the workplace and sane living for all of us, the theory must be put into action. That is the challenge we face in the evolving Ireland of today. ”

Dorothy Butler Scally, Independent consultant in personal and professional development

“ If partnership is to take hold at the level of the enterprise and start to address what many consider to be the ‘democratic deficit’, then sufficient and adequate financial and human resources will have to be provided to the NCPP. This would enable the process to be rolled out into individual workplaces and support employee representatives and management who are prepared to engage with these innovations by putting resources at their disposal. ”

Jerry Shanahan, Member of Executive Council, Irish Congress of Trade Unions

“ As a new member of Council I am impressed with the work of the NCPP since its establishment in 2001. As we begin now to agree and to implement a new programme for the next three years, it is clear that there are big challenges ahead. For me, the real challenge is that the broad agenda and activities of the NCPP translate into meaningful and positive experiences for workers in their everyday working lives. ”

Catherine Byrne, Deputy General Secretary, Irish National Teachers’ Organisation

“ The ground work has been completed. There is a clear understanding of what the workplace of the future should look like. What is required now is action at the level of the workplace supported by government and the social partners to do what needs to be done. ”

Fergus Whelan, Industrial Officer, Irish Congress of Trade Unions

“ The NCPP will play an even more important role in the evolution of Irish industrial policy and industrial relations in the years ahead. All stakeholders must have a role in moving the partnership and performance process forward and in doing so must ensure that workers at every level are involved. The NCPP’s success or otherwise will be measured in terms of how all stakeholders respond to the challenges of globalisation, competition, employee involvement, change processes and the need to ensure that the best employment standards are maintained in Ireland. ”

Gerry McCormack, National Industrial Secretary, SIPTU

“ The NCPP has an integral role to play in supporting the future competitiveness of Irish industry. Irish organisations are now operating within a dynamic, knowledge-based and increasingly highly competitive market. This new marketplace is demanding that organisations both public and private adapt to and embrace change in order to remain competitive in the future. The Forum on the Workplace of the Future will provide an essential framework and knowledge bank that will help Irish organisations manage this change and remain one step ahead of the curve. ”

Professor Joyce O’Connor, President of the National College of Ireland

“ Competitiveness, achieved through a partnership approach with workers, is essential in every sector of the Irish economy going forward. ”

Edward Keenan, Director of Industrial Relations, Employment and Manpower Services, Construction Industry Federation