Collaborative Labor Management Relations Assist in Agencies Reaching their Goals and Objectives

Summary of Proceedings
July 12, 2005
SUMMARY

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Washington, DC [July 13, 2005] During an Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implementation Leadership Forum held on Tuesday, July 12, 2005, federal agency leaders concluded that collaborative labor management relationships lead to successful business results and win-win opportunities for both the employees and the employer. They also discussed the implications that NSPS will have on these partnerships.

“Every piece of data that exists concludes that collaborative labor management produces better organizational results than a labor management relationship based on laws, regulations, and negotiated collective bargaining agreements. If this is true, why are so many labor management relationships based on a compliance strategy?” questioned ISPPI Director, Robert M. Tobias.

Leif Petersen, Deputy Director of Personnel of Air Force Material Command at Wright Patterson Air Force Base and Scott Blanch, President of AFGE Joint Council discussed the successful way that the AFMC and the AFGE have worked together through collaborative labor management. They reviewed their past working relations and pointed out the important efforts that both sides have taken to make their relationship a successful one. They also debated what will happen to this relationship and others like theirs in light of NSPS.

One of the major topics discussed was the importance of sharing information through open communication and how this was directly linked to the trust that is needed in collaborative labor management.

Participants who attended the session gained understanding in:

- The importance of communication
- The need to create and maintain trust
- The success of collaboration
- The importance of interest based negotiation as opposed to position based negotiation
Introduction and Discussion by ISPPI Director Robert M. Tobias

“Can a collaborative labor management relationship survive NSPS?”

Introduction:
Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implement (ISPPI) Director Robert M. Tobias opened the meeting with a brief overview of the mission and goals of ISPPI, followed by a discussion of what the status of current labor management relationships were in participants’ agencies. While not all agencies used collaborative labor management they all saw the benefit of such relationships.

Some of observation expressed by Leadership Forum participants, whose agencies did utilize collaborative management relationships, included:
- It has positive impacts in terms of faster, easier, cheaper, and better implementation
- Even though everyone does not agree all the time they at least understand each other’s perspectives
- When it is used it works quickly and easily

Participants, whose agencies did not use collaborative management, agreed that they saw the benefits of it any many expressed a desire for their agencies to use it.

Tobias then introduced the session by discussing the advantages and disadvantages of both compliance strategies as well as collaborative strategies. Some of the advantages of collaboration strategy included:
- Labor management use interest-based problem-solving as the basic method of resolving disputes
- A well-crafted collaborative solution improves the quality of the decision-making, as well as reduces subsequent problems arising from the actual implementation
- It tends to increase the level of trust between the parties

“The data shows that a collaborative labor management relationship produces better organizational results than an unorganized workplace,” concluded Tobias.
Peterson and Blanch began their presentation by discussing the combative relationship that the AFMC and the AFGE used to share, considered by some to be there worst in the federal government. Historically, it had been an adversarial relationship with most of the issues being resolved by third parties. After many years of trying to work out a labor agreement with no success both sides recognized that drastic changes needed to take place in terms of how they related to each other.

With strong commitment from both sides they began working together in the late 1990s to improve their relationship. They realized that their former relationship had resulted in frustration for both sides as well as a huge loss in money, time and energy for everyone. Both parties agreed to come to the table, leaving the past at the door. In 1998 they held the San Antonio Summit where they hammered out a partnership agreement through the use of a facilitator. Each side had five representatives at the official meeting. Additionally, the management had their leadership staff, who not part of the negotiation, were available for immediate updates and consultation. It is important to note, that preparation for this meeting took a year. Both sides believe the preparation and the use of a facilitator were imperative to the success of this summit.

This new partnership required crucial buy in from both parties. Therefore, both sides took large steps to assure that bad actors did not interfere in its implementation. While management was able to do this fairly easily, that was not the case for the union. The union made local trips to get local leaders and members on board so that local presidents would understand the importance of this partnership.

The AFMC/AFGE partnership was re-established in June 1999. Today, they continue to make their quarterly meetings a priority and make a concerted effort to work out deals before reverting to traditional bargaining. Before the partnership was established union leaders would meet with labor managers who did not have the authority to make crucial decisions, however, now a career SES person, who does have that authority to make decisions, works directly with the union representatives. Another crucial factor in the success of this partnership is that both sides are emphasizing the need to share information accurately and early in order to build and maintain the trusting relationship that the have build with each other.

In 2001 the AMFC and the AFGE were able to negotiate their term labor agreement in 21 days. These impressive negotiations dealt with key issues including official time, grievance/arbitration, employee performance, as well as many others. They have also successfully negotiated other issues including ADR, Wingman Day, and PSCM (Purchasing and Supply Chain Management).

While both sides agree that their relationship has led to a win-win situation for everyone involved, there is some concern as to what will happen in light of NSPS. The question is not whether the partnership will continue to be successful with the current people sitting at the table but rather whether there will be the same commitment to the partnership as the future comes and the people sitting at the table begin to change.