THE VALUE OF LABOR MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

BY SHELLEY CARLUCCI

Labor Management Committees – working together in a cooperative partnership, committed to effectively addressing and resolving workplace issues, in collaboration, to achieve greater communication within all levels of the organization.

In December of 1997, the County of Orange, together with the labor organizations representing most of their 16,000 employees embarked on an historic path – they entered into agreements to establish labor management committees within all County agencies and departments. Little did they know at the time, that the LMC’s were destined for such success – because a new environment of mutual trust, cooperation and respect had been established between the County and its workforce – which was the key to their success.

The County of Orange and their labor organizations desired to mutually encourage a cooperative partnership approach to addressing and resolving employer/employee relations issues. An opportunity was created for labor and management representatives to promote and maintain harmonious labor management relations through establishing a central Labor Management Steering Committee and Labor Management Task Force, both of whom provided oversight and coordination of the work of the LMC’s.

The County and its labor organizations were committed to the success of the LMC’s, and established basic ground rules to guide them through the process. Some of these ground rules included: agendas would consist of issues raised by management and the labor organizations, and have some community of interest; the LMC environment would provide open lines of communication between labor and management in which all parties are free to openly discuss issues of importance and concern; top County and union leadership were committed to the process, and methods for measuring outcomes and evaluating progress would be established.

During the 1997 contract negotiations, the County and its labor organizations were successful in reaching timely agreements due in large part to the establishment of the LMC’s. There were a number of issues and proposals left open, which were identified as issues most productively handled in the cooperative labor management environment. Some of these issues included:

♦ Performance incentive program
♦ Employee parking issues
♦ Ergonomic and safety issues
♦ Alternate work schedules
♦ Training issues

It was quickly discovered that the possibilities for projects and issues for the LMC’s to work on were endless. But first, the committee members needed to be selected. The labor organizations selected their representatives, and the agencies and departments within the County selected the management representatives. Although the committee members had been selected, they were uncertain as to how to actually begin the
collaborative meeting process. Also, understandably, there were some fears, some apprehension and uncertainty that went along with this new beginning. In order for the groups to be productive, and to really work together as teams, the 300+ committee members received training in Team Building Skills. The County contracted to provide this training, and the LMC teams learned through this process how to effectively work together, and learned some valuable tools and techniques to facilitate the team building process.

They were trained in team roles, which include facilitators – who focus on process, more than content, of the discussions and use open questioning to elicit and move the discussion along; team leaders – who manage the LMC’s toward accomplishing their tasks and lead the team activities; team members – who contribute expert knowledge and help to get input from co-workers; sponsors – those individuals designated with the authority to assist the LMC’s in being successful, they receive the LMC’s ideas, provide whatever resources are needed, coordinate the team’s work to prevent duplication and to ensure consistency and, most importantly, they get rid of roadblocks that may prevent the LMC from doing its job; they also monitor the LMC’s progress. The LMC’s also learned consensus building and decision making techniques. Armed with these new skills and knowledge, the LMC’s were ready to go.

Learning to Work Together – It’s All About Trust

One of the biggest challenges the LMC’s faced in starting out were fears – from both labor and management – about working together in an environment where titles and traditional roles were left outside the door – all are equals in the process. The Team Building training that LMC members went through together went a long way to alleviate these fears. Dealing with fears was actually talked about openly. One of the most amazing outcomes of going through an exercise to deal with fears was the discovery that fears and concerns really mirror each other for both labor and management.

Not only did labor and management learn to work together differently, the 24 agencies and departments within the County learned to work together differently, as well. The LMC’s were organized so that some agencies and departments were combined, particularly some of the smaller ones, to work together in combined committees. Initially, some of the departments expressed that they were very unique in their interests and issues, and that it would be more productive if they worked individually – not with other agencies and departments. The LMC concept was very much supported by top County leadership, particularly the Board of Supervisors and the County Executive Officer, who believed that the County agencies and departments have many areas of common interest, and that it would be more productive, and in the interest of true collaboration for these agencies and departments to participate together in the LMC process. The agencies and departments, in fact the County as a whole organization, have realized many benefits of this collaborative process since the LMC’s have been in place. Labor Management Committees have played a large part in the County becoming a more accountable and efficient organization. The relationship between the County and its workforce has noticeably become one that is built on trust and accountability, with all involved in the process.
LMC’s Get Busy

In order for the LMC’s to remain on track and to be productive, facilitators and co-facilitators were appointed for each committee. Each LMC had a facilitator from corporate human resources or Employee Relations, and a co-facilitator appointed from the labor organization. Each LMC also selected a Team Leader, and in some committees, co-team leaders. Each LMC quickly evolved into its own unique committee – and all members stepped up to the challenges ahead of them. The LMC’s practiced decision making by consensus – a technique designed to move the process along. Consensus means that all committee members arrive at a decision together that all can live with – realizing that not all members may agree – and that there is some compromise along the way.

While there were many workplace issues for the LMC’s to deal with, the first project that each of the LMC’s worked on was developing a pay for performance, or performance incentive program for the employees represented by the various labor organizations. Implementing a performance incentive program, which was based on collaboration between supervisors and employees, and also based on setting meaningful goals that connected with agency and department business plans, was a priority for the Board of Supervisors and the County Executive Officer. It was an important piece of the Corporate Management System being developed for the County of Orange.

In keeping with the spirit of collaboration, the LMC’s decided that input from the entire workforce was important to their success. They also realized that the workforce needed to know who the LMC’s were – what their purpose was. So, the LMC’s embarked on a series of steps designed to inform and communicate. First, LMC’s each developed a project charter and mission statement to guide them and keep them on track. Then, before beginning their communication with the workforce, they developed communication plans. A centralized communications subcommittee was appointed, who reviewed communication plans and provided oversight to the committees with respect to their various methods of communication. Many of the LMC’s got very creative with their communication plans, and they created interesting and unique newsletters for employees, designed to keep the workforce well informed.

The LMC’s designed different methods for soliciting feedback from the workforce to help them with the various task and projects assigned to them by the Steering Committee and Task Force. At first, these tasks and projects primarily related to the development and implementation of the performance incentive program. These various tasks and projects included the development of goal criteria and sample goals for employees, developing a process for selecting internal trainers from the workforce to train 16,000 employees in the concepts of the new performance incentive program, and to develop a support and conciliation process for employees and supervisors to use as they worked through the new performance incentive program when it was developed. The LMC’s designed feedback forms and also conducted surveys and focus groups around the County, so they could be certain that all input and ideas which came form the workforce were considered and discussed in the development process.
Innovation and Creativity – Breaking New Ground

The LMC process was something new for the County – a new way of doing business. LMC’s were able to approach their projects with a great deal of flexibility, working within some very broad guidelines. An opportunity was created for innovation, and the LMC’s took advantage. Early on in the development of the performance incentive program, the County realized that the workforce would need to be trained in the new concepts of this program – collaboration, goal setting and accountability for performance. Working together with the LMC’s, the County realized that in order for the new program to be accepted and meaningful to the employees, it was important that those training them have credibility with the workforce. Who better to train employees than employees themselves? The challenge facing the LMC’s – how to tap into the talent of employees who might be interested in training the workforce.

The LMC’s were involved in the selection of outside expertise to assist the County in putting this unique training program into place. A Labor Management Advisory Team (LMAT) worked together to select a professional consulting firm, and worked with the firm to develop the selection process for the trainers. Each agency and department LMC designed an advertisement for interested employees to audition to be a PIP (performance incentive program) trainer. Qualifications were such that virtually any employee could apply. Many involved in the process thought that there wouldn’t be too much interest from employees to participate in this type of project. They thought getting 100-150 trainers from the County workforce would be nearly impossible. To the surprise of many, nearly 400 County employees applied to audition for a chance to be a PIP trainer. Of those, about 300 actually auditioned before panels of both labor and management representatives and 150 were selected to be trainers. The new trainers participated in an intensive train the trainer program, developed in collaboration with the County, LMC’s and the training consultants, before they began training.

The potential PIP trainers gave presentations to the rating panels that were innovative, creative and fun. Presentations ranged from how employees do their jobs, to demonstrations of their hobbies, such as cooking, snowboarding and even skydiving. Those not selected were offered other opportunities to participate in the collaborative process – they became PIP Ambassadors, and helped in many other ways to promote the PIP concepts throughout the County and within their agencies and departments.

The LMC’s also got creative with developing their goal criteria and sample goals. Each LMC took a somewhat different approach and developed guidelines for goal setting, goal categories and sample goal statements. The County’s performance incentive program is designed around the premise of SMART goal setting – specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic and time-bound. Working within these parameters, the LMC’s used the input and ideas gathered from the workforce regarding goal setting, and designed some creative sample goals which will be very useful as employees and supervisors begin working under the new program in January, 2000.
Another project which provided the opportunity for LMC’s to be creative and innovative was their work in developing a support and conciliation process for employees and supervisors to use as they begin to work under the new performance evaluation and incentive program – PIP. This process was designed to provide a method to resolve issues related to PIP; to be readily and easily accessible and to promote a high degree of collaboration between employees and supervisors. The LMC’s helped to select the individuals who would be on the Labor Management Advisory Teams – both from management and labor – to assist employees and supervisors in resolving disputes arising out of specified areas of the new performance management process, such as goal setting, progress reviews, annual reviews and establishing improvement plans.

Over 300 County employees were selected as either primary or alternate members of the Labor Management Advisory Teams. Each agency or department within the County will have a team, and each labor organization is represented on these teams. In order for these teams to be effective, the County contracted with The Mediation Center to provide a certificate-training program. The 300+ participants are currently going through this training, and are learning valuable dispute and conflict resolution skills designed to support the new program.

Doing Business Differently – The Beginning of a New County Culture

The County of Orange is committed to the collaborative labor management process, and to the development of a corporate management and leadership model that is accountable and results oriented. A culture is emerging where input is valued, and employee participation and accountability are cornerstones of the way business is done. This is a culture that is transitioning from “tell” oriented, to employee self-sufficiency and accountability, and to one which believes that all of the workforce has the potential to be leaders. In order to help the workforce better understand and work in this type of culture, the County brought the Enlightened Leadership Program to the workforce. All department heads, supervisors and managers received this training, as well as each of the 300+ LMC members. Sixteen County employees were trained to be Enlightened Leadership Facilitators, and were used to provide this training to the workforce. Feedback about this training from the workforce has been overwhelmingly positive and encouraging; and for some, a significant transformation in the way they approach both their personal and professional lives.

The LMC’s have completed much of their work, which supports the development, and implementation of the County’s Performance Incentive Program (PIP). However, they will continue to play a key role in the County’s future and the changing County culture. The original purpose for establishing the LMC’s was to address and resolve workplace issues, many of which were identified during contract negotiations as best being addressed and resolved within agencies and departments, by labor management committees. To this end, LMC’s have been provided, by their sponsors, the guidelines for identifying and resolving workplace issues. Recognizing that feedback and input from the workforce is needed to successfully address and identify the workplace issues, the LMC’s are in the process of developing feedback and communication mechanisms to assist them with this project. While LMC’s begin to deal with workplace issues, they will also be monitoring the effectiveness and success of the PIP program.
Future of the LMC’s

The LMC’s have been in place and meeting together for approximately a year, and are transitioning to be owned more directly by the agencies and departments, with some oversight and less direct involvement of corporate human resources and Employee Relations. The LMC’s will continue to be linked by their Team Leaders and agency and department human resources managers, who will assume the facilitation of the regular meetings. Team leaders and facilitators continue to come together for monthly meetings. This networking opportunity is another key to the success of the LMC’s.

County leadership recognizes the LMC’s and the joint labor management process as vital and valuable to the County’s future. LMC’s will continue to play a key role in the development of key initiatives important to the Board of Supervisors. The collaborative process has proven to be successful and is one that will be around for many years to come.

Enclosed for your reference:

♦ Project Charter
♦ Communication Plan Guidelines
♦ Sample Agency/Department Newsletter
♦ Sample LMC Update Newsletter
♦ Goal Project Guidelines
♦ Sample Goal Statements
♦ Support and Conciliation Process Guidelines
♦ Workplace Solution Guidelines

The Value of Labor Management Committees

Submitted and prepared by:

Shelley Carlucci
Deputy Employee Relations Manager
County Of Orange
CEO/Office of Human Resources/Labor Relations
10 Civic Center Plaza
Santa Ana, CA 92701

714.834.3194