

Work Restructuring and Employee Involvement: Watching Out for the Tricks and Traps



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Introduction

Our workplaces have become a place of rapid and ongoing change. New technologies such as computers and computer-controlled equipment; new forms of work organization such as Lean Production, teams, multi-skilling, cells and just-in-time (JIT); and new programs for changing and controlling the work process such as Six Sigma, Continuous Improvement, Process Mapping and Kaizen are all being introduced into the workplace on a regular basis, and are creating turbulence in the lives of our members and in our unions.

Management is making changes in technology and in the work process to meet their goals of productivity, efficiency, profitability and control, but these changes have impacts on all of the issues that are important to the workforce including the number of jobs, job security, wages and benefits, respect and dignity, health and safety, equity, unity, skills, and so on. They also can undercut the strength and viability of the union and lead to fundamental shifts in the power relationship between the union and management.

Historically, unions in the United States have been excluded from any significant discussion of (or bargaining over) work restructuring and technological change by the doctrine of management rights which is built into most contracts and into the “culture” of labor-management relations. In too many cases, unions have accepted the doctrine of management rights despite devastating changes in the workplace, throwing their hands up and saying there is nothing we can do. The union role has often been limited to “rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic” or, at best, what might be called “negotiating the terms of the funeral”.

Faced with significant (and sometimes overwhelming) changes in technology and work organization, some unions have entered into labor-management programs with the hope of gaining greater voice for their members, or with the despair that there is nothing else they can do. They feel that the only choices they have are to be completely outside the process of change or to jump on board and accept management’s program. Management, meanwhile, has been busy developing programs and techniques designed to facilitate change which contain the rhetoric of involvement and voice, while carefully avoiding the substance of collective voice. These management-designed programs seek to make changes in the workplace and to engage the workforce in the discussion of change, while maintaining strict management control over the process. They are designed to bypass established union mechanisms and to specifically interfere with the union “acting like a union” and negotiating over change with management.

This pamphlet is a warning to local unions and a guide to questioning the techniques and watching out for the “**Tricks and Traps**” of involvement. It focuses on situations where management is using some kind of committees, teams, focus groups, involvement committees, problem-solving groups, etc. to facilitate changes in the work process and to engage the workforce in a discussion of change. It takes a critical look at the techniques used in many of the involvement programs and analyzes how they impact the members and the union. Understanding the tricks and traps is the first step, but only the first step, in developing a true union strategy for bargaining over change.

The Involvement Movement: A Management Driven Program for Discussing Change

Under many different names, such as Six Sigma, Lean, Kaizen, Continuous Improvement, Total Quality Management (TQM), Employee Involvement, Empowerment, Employee Participation, Problem Solving Teams, World Class, etc., management is bringing programs into our workplaces which create new and important challenges for our locals.¹

Despite the wide variety of names, the programs that have been brought into our workplaces generally have certain common characteristics:

- * They are designed to facilitate change in the way work is done;
- * They often use the rhetoric of workforce involvement in decision-making, using such terms as empowerment and self-direction;
- * They often contain significant "criticism" of management, and particularly of the "old way" that management has been operating;
- * They use "teams" or some kind of group activity, either within (self directed work teams or natural work groups) or outside (problem-solving teams, department steering committees, etc.) the work process;
- * They gather and use employees' knowledge about the work process;
- * They often involve a great deal of "training" for the members in so-called soft skills (communications, group processes, holding meetings, etc.) and in the "right" way to think about and solve problems;
- * They are generally designed and/or implemented by or with the support of a consultant; and

¹ We will use the general term “involvement program” to describe these programs in this pamphlet. It should be noted that the actual level of employee involvement can vary greatly from program to program, and work restructuring programs that contain no employee involvement should still trigger a strategic response by the union.

- * They are often developed without significant union input or with union input coming only after many of the key decisions have been made. Even where there is union “participation”, the core approach and principles of the program generally come from management or from a management-oriented consultant.

There are concrete reasons why restructuring programs with an involvement component are appearing in many of our workplaces. Companies and public sector organizations are facing pressures from competitors, from investors, from customers and/or from taxpayers to save money and to increase profits. At the same time, new technology, especially computers and telecommunications, is allowing management to make changes in the work process that they could not have even dreamed of a decade ago. The combination of pressure and opportunity is creating the movement for change in the way goods are produced and services are provided.

In order to meet their goals of maintaining and increasing profitability, management is looking for a program for implementing change that they can control and direct. The problem they often run into is that they need to gather the skills and knowledge of the workforce in order to make the changes they want and to make sure that the changes they do make meet management's needs and goals. In order to succeed in their plans, management needs two things from the workforce:

- They need them to accept change (and in particular the changes that management is seeking); and
- They need them to contribute to management's plan for change, to help implement it by volunteering their intimate knowledge of the work process.

Key to all of this is the reality of work processes that are dependent on the skill of the workforce, on what is sometimes called organic knowledge or tacit knowledge – the knowledge that isn't written down, hasn't been captured in computer programs and hasn't been made “scientific”. Management has to find a way to “harvest” this knowledge so that they can build it into their work processes, their computer systems and their standard operating procedures.

Management is seeking to create a program for discussing change that they can shape and control, a program that doesn't allow workers to use the power that their knowledge and skill provides and that doesn't allow workers to act collectively. The techniques described in this pamphlet are the heart of that program.

Even where the union has been aggressive in carving out a union space within management's program, the pitfalls described below can de-rail the union's plans and bend the programs activities (and our members) to the company's wishes. Negotiated language that seems to give the union some mechanisms of control is often not as protective as it seems on the surface² and unions have often been lulled into complacency and have not been aggressive in pursuing even the limited rights that the language does give them. Because local unions are often ignorant of the dangers of these management programs, because they often do not have the resources, the experience and information, the specific expertise or the trained personnel to analyze, critique and revise management-developed plans, they are generally at a significant disadvantage in dealing with management and their well-paid consultants.

Involvement programs are often introduced with the help of consultants who use a series of techniques and exercises to involve your members in management's program of workplace change and to change the way your members think about the world around them. These techniques are the result of years of research into group dynamics, peer pressure, conformance (getting people to adopt or conform to a new set of values) and brainwashing. They can use them to create small group identity among your members and bend it towards management's needs. Instead of identifying themselves with the union, members identify with the group or team. We call this: "Hijacking the collective."

Many consultants claim to be neutral - neither pro-labor nor pro-management. But it is important to understand that in claiming to be neutral, these consultants are really siding with management. Paulo Friere who developed many of the educational techniques used by labor educators once said: "Washing one's hands of the struggle between the powerful and the powerless is to side with the powerful, not to remain neutral." He was pointing out that there is an imbalance of power between management and workers, and that anyone who comes into this situation claiming to be neutral is really siding with management. This includes consultants who claim neutrality in a labor-management situation. You will see that many of the techniques described below, despite their appearance of "fairness", significantly undercut core sources of union power while leaving management sources of power intact or even strengthened.

Continuous Bargaining in the Changing Workplace

² See the Fact Sheet *Avoiding False Security: Analyzing the Limitations of "Protective" Contract Language* by the Labor Extension Program, University of Massachusetts Lowell.

Unions have to find a way to insert the collective voice of the union into the discussion of change in the workplace. Unfortunately, as we will discuss, the basic model for most change programs that involve our members has been developed by management and management-oriented consulting firms, and cannot serve as the basis for real collective union input into change. This management model seeks to involve the members in the discussion of change, while leaving the union, and unionism, on the outside. A different model would have the union approaching any discussion with management as bargaining - with the independent goals, resources and activities that we engage in during contract bargaining that are designed to build the union and effectively represent the needs of the members. We call this approach, continuous bargaining.³

The goal of this pamphlet is not to shut down a program that allows and supports real bargaining over change. It is instead a warning, designed to help make sure that the union is at the table, prepared to powerfully represent the members' interests and protect the union whenever change takes place. The challenge for unions is to develop a union agenda and a union-building strategy for responding to change. In order to do this, you should be aware of the dangers that can accompany these techniques, and make a conscious decision about how to deal with them.

If the techniques described in this pamphlet sound familiar to you - Watch Out! Look carefully at the involvement or restructuring program in your workplace to understand how it might be affecting your union, then develop a counter-strategy. A good basic rule of thumb is to – if we were in bargaining, would we let management do what they are doing, would we act the way we are?

This pamphlet is also aimed at giving you an understanding of involvement programs where the "rubber hits the road," in the actual implementation. This is where your members will see it, and this is where they can be lured down a wrong path by management's way of looking at the world, by management's use of the tricks and traps.

Involvement Techniques: Don't we use these inside the union?

As you read this pamphlet, you may notice that the approaches and techniques we describe sound suspiciously like ones used by union/labor educators, organizers and others who are working to involve and activate members. You may even have used some of them in your union. **Many of these techniques, when used in a union-only process, can be very helpful in building the union. But techniques which are useful for the union, can have very different impacts and meanings when**

³ See the Fact Sheet *Treat It as Continuous Bargaining* by the Labor Extension Program, University of Massachusetts Lowell for information about adopting a bargaining approach to dealing with change and counteracting management involvement initiatives.

they are used in a labor-management setting.

Brainstorming, for example, is a technique used by labor educators and involvement consultants alike. Brainstorming is described in one employee involvement booklet as: “An idea generation technique useful whenever a wide variety of ideas is desirable.” In brainstorming, participants try to generate a long list of ideas using ground rules like:

“Criticism or evaluation of ideas not allowed during the brainstorming session.

Quantity of ideas is desirable.

“Wild and Crazy” ideas welcomed.

Combining/improving of ideas encouraged, e.g. piggybacking on others’ ideas.”⁴

Brainstorming is a very good way to gather new ideas from your members and involve them in a discussion of issues. It is a great technique to use when a union committee or union side of a joint committee is planning strategy. But when brainstorming is used in a labor-management setting, it is an anti-union technique. It is anti-union because it forces union participants to act as individuals. It is also anti-union because:

- ideas are put on the table before the union has had a chance to evaluate them for their impact on the members and the union;
- there is no opportunity for the union to package ideas or proposals (to link together proposals or suggestions that are good for the company with proposals that are good for the union);
- union members might put forward contradictory ideas or suggestions, which can give management an edge when it comes to formal bargaining over issues; and
- divisions among bargaining unit members are exposed to management.

Participants in brainstorming are in fact specifically told not to evaluate the impacts of their ideas before putting them in front of management, not to think about how the members and the union might be affected. They are told to act as individuals and to set aside the whole concept of collective voice.

⁴ From Bethlehem Steel Employee Involvement Booklet titled “The Circle of Success”, emphasis added

In this pamphlet we will look at some of the techniques used in involvement programs and evaluate the apparent lessons of the techniques (what they seem to be or are supposed to be teaching us), as well as at the deeper and more subtle lessons - the tricks and traps. You should understand that the facilitator or trainer using these techniques may not even recognize or understand these deeper lessons. But protests of: "That's not what I meant to do!" doesn't change the impact of these techniques on the union.

Our own members are even trained to use these techniques. And they use them without any sense of how they might affect the union and the members. But remember, a union person using a technique with negative impacts on the union can be even more dangerous than a management person using the same technique because people will tend to let their guard down, they won't be as cautious as they would with a management facilitator.

Some of the points that are made in this pamphlet may seem like nitpicking – they may seem to be overstating the dangers of the techniques. But in practice, these techniques are not used individually. They are used as a package within a well-organized and orchestrated program of discussing and implementing change. With several of these and other techniques being applied, even the strongest unionists can be moved (bit by bit) away from their traditional union values.

Isn't the Real Problem "Bad" Management?

One thing that can leave unions un-guarded in dealing with involvement consultants is the fact that many of them are very critical of existing management practices. Their criticisms even match what union folks have been saying for years - that management has a short term view, that they focus too much on "getting it out the door", that they never listen to the workers who know the job, and that they want to blame everything on the workforce even though they don't give us the necessary tools, materials, training, time and support.

To the extent that management (the people or the system) is a barrier to the achievement of "management goals" of productivity, quality and competitiveness, consultants will be glad to criticize them. W. Edwards Deming, one of the fathers of the quality movement, is well known for his (often vicious) attacks on management. The purpose of these attacks, however, is to build up, not undercut, management. Thinking that someone who criticizes management is the union's friend is a big mistake in this situation.

It is indeed tempting to believe that our problems are due to the failure of management to be good managers, and therefore that Deming and the others are "on our side." But as unionists, we are not just protecting our members from "bad" management. We also have to be concerned about "good" management, which will de-skill us, speed us up, contract out our work and eliminate our jobs. We should not let ourselves be fooled by consultants who undercut managers in order to achieve management goals.

Analyzing Involvement Techniques

We obviously cannot, in this pamphlet, talk about all of the techniques that involvement programs and consultants use. We will instead give some examples of techniques and discuss the problems they can create for the union. We will present a method for looking at consultant techniques and analyzing their impact on the union and the members. We will also make suggestions about how a union can respond to and disarm the techniques. **The most important thing that a union can do is to get information about the tricks and traps into the hands of officers, stewards and members and to develop an organized response before the management and the consultants have a chance to implement their plans.**

In looking at the techniques of involvement, it is important to examine at least four areas of concern:

1. The impact of the technique on the role of the union as the representative of the members.

Does the union have a significant place in the discussion of changes in the work process?

Does the technique displace or replace the union as the representative of the members?

Does the technique interfere with independent interaction between the members and the union?

2. The impact of the technique on the member's ability and willingness to act like a union – to act collectively with other members.

Do union members get to meet separately from management?

Do union members get to work as a union group or are they pushed to act either individually or only in joint formations?

Is group activity directed toward achieving management's goals?

3. The values that are built into the technique and/or activity.

Is cutting labor costs (and therefore cutting jobs) seen as a good thing?

Is conflict between labor and management seen as bad?

Are union values such as solidarity and independent, collective action anywhere to be found?

4. The assumptions that the techniques bring with them.

Do they assume that "competitiveness" is always positive and is the over-riding goal of any workplace change?

Does training promote a view that "competitiveness" is the only real problem and that if we just help with competitiveness, we will be taken care of?

Do techniques assume that what is good for management is necessarily good for the union and its members?

Do they assume that management should be able to make the final decisions?

The impact of any technique on the strength and role of the union is of course especially important to us. Questions that should be asked include:

- How does the technique impact the members' sense of identity as union members and their sense of solidarity with fellow members?
- Does the technique support or promote the idea that labor and management have the same goals and therefore undercut the concept of independent and separate union goals?
- How does the technique affect the members' and the union's sense of what the "problem" is that needs to be solved? Is competitiveness seen as the overriding issue? Do union issues, concerns and problems get on the table?
- How does the technique affect the union's and the members' concrete ability to "act like a union" in its dealings with management?
- Does the technique promote judging people based on "merit," with merit defined by the needs of management?
- Does the technique undercut union activities and culture?

- Does the technique affect identification with other workers outside the union? For example, are people who work for competitors or suppliers seen as competitors? Will this affect peoples' willingness to engage in organizing or solidarity activities? In other words, does the technique build a culture of "company unionism"?

Remember that the techniques described below can be used in involvement programs ranging from the most openly anti-union to the most "union-involved." While their power may be less where the union is active, their purpose and the threat they pose for the union remain the same.

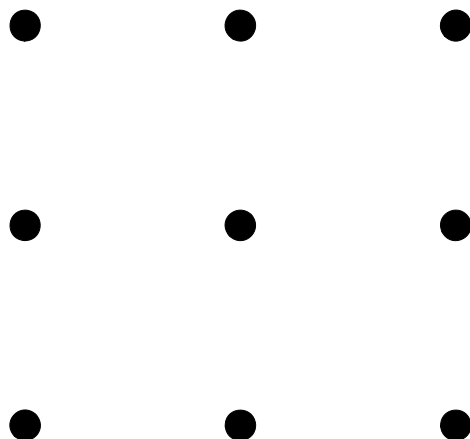
The Techniques

In this section, we will describe and discuss some of the specific techniques that are used in involvement programs, analyze their impact on the members and the union, and offer ideas about what the union can do in response.

1) Nine Dot Exercise

The Nine Dot Exercise is one example of brain-teasers that are often used at the beginning of a involvement session. There are many others that are very similar.

In the Nine Dot Exercise, participants are shown a flip chart (or given a hand-out) with nine dots arranged as below:

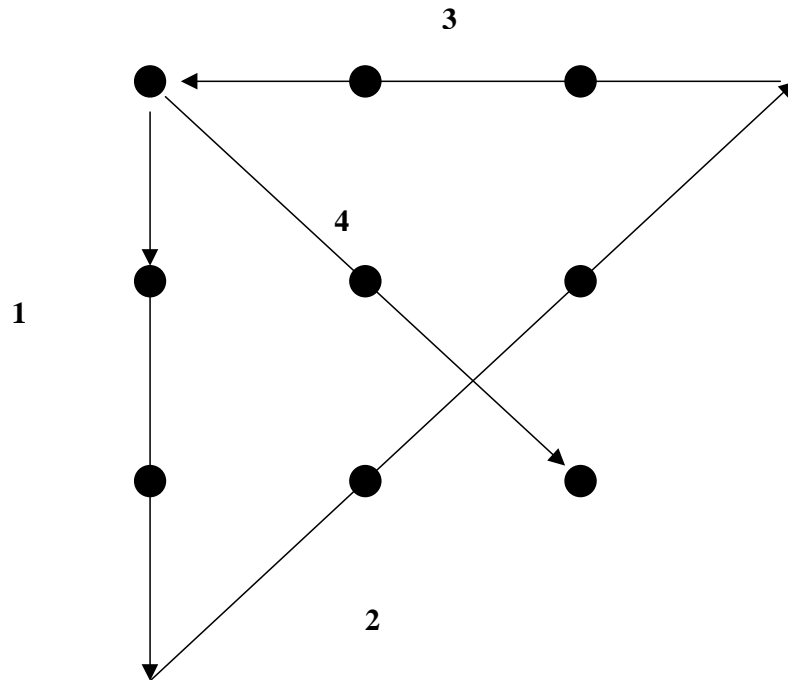


They are challenged to find a way to connect all nine dots by drawing four straight lines. They are told that they cannot lift their pens/pencils off the paper and they cannot re-trace over any line

(although crossing lines is permitted).

Participants are given a few minutes to work on solving the problem. Generally, other than those who have seen the problem done before, no one will find a solution.

The instructor then shows the participants how to do the problem.



People are told that the reason that they couldn't find the solution was that they were "stuck in the box" formed by the dots. They failed to move outside the "boundaries," even though no one had told them they couldn't.

The lessons that consultants draw from this exercise are that:

- 1) "We" can solve problems even if they seem impossible;
- 2) The barriers to solving them are our narrow mindedness and traditional way of thinking about problems; and
- 3) The key to solving problems is to broaden our thinking, to not get "stuck inside the box."

The lesson that "just because you can't see a solution doesn't mean there isn't one" is a good one for us all to learn. And the idea that we often need to expand our thinking is certainly not wrong. But there are other more subtle lessons that are drawn from this exercise when it is done in (or applied to) a labor-management setting. It has the specific effect of softening people up for the new ways of thinking that will be introduced later.

Another way to state the real lessons of the exercise is that:

- 1) People should question the way that they have been thinking about the world and
- 2) If they don't, they are to blame for the fact that things aren't working and problems aren't being solved.

In essence, people are accused of narrow thinking that is preventing them from solving problems. This sets the stage for the argument that the problem that they are failing to solve is "competitiveness", that this failure is a result of narrow thinking on their part and that it is this failure that is creating all of our other problems, such as job loss, wage decline, insecurity, etc. We are supposed to believe that if only union people could change their way of thinking (not be stuck inside the box), they could solve the problem of competitiveness and at the same time create a better life for everyone. The box that people are caught in, the "old thinking" (or old paradigm) that is preventing solutions and that people need to get rid of, is of course their deep belief in seniority, job descriptions, work rules, health and safety protections, and in union goals and identity separate from management (aka adversarialism).

The key questions we need to ask are: Who is being asked to get outside which box? and Does "getting outside the box" mean surrendering our basic values?

A participant in a union-only training on the tricks and traps described how the consultant had used the nine dot exercise at their labor-management involvement training. The member had tried throughout the day to question the "solutions" that were being discussed, citing concerns about job security, seniority, etc., but he was consistently attacked by the other participants for being "stuck inside the box." He eventually gave up raising the union issues because the pressure to conform (to get outside the union box) from the facilitator and from fellow participants (including fellow members) was too great.

Another impact of this exercise is to start the training session by making people feel stupid and incompetent, because they are unable to solve a "simple" puzzle. The facilitator, on the other hand,

comes off as competent and bright because they can solve the puzzle (even though they never had to figure out the solution because someone told them how to do it). This helps create a situation where people tend to under-value their own ideas and instincts (which couldn't help them solve the nine dot problem) and overly rely on the knowledge of the facilitator.

Basically people are made to (subconsciously) feel: "Well, even though this plan doesn't seem right to me, I couldn't do the 9 Dot exercise and the facilitator could, so maybe I'm just stuck in an old or narrow way of thinking." Thus this exercise tends to soften people up for other ideas that are introduced later in the program.

The final point to notice is that while the facilitator is telling your members to "get outside the box", get beyond the old rules and the old thinking, he or she is also imposing a new set of rules on the members: "you can't use more than four lines, you can't lift your pen off the paper, you can't retrace steps." They want us to drop our rules (get out our box) but they also assume that we will accept theirs.

Ideas for Acting Like a Union:

If someone knows the answer (or figures it out), they can go to all of the union members and show them the solution (act collectively - act like a union).

Everyone could use 5 lines instead of 4, or could pick their pencils up off the paper, and then challenge the facilitator's right to make the rules.

2) Lost in the Desert

Lost in the Desert is one of several "Lost..." exercises (Lost at Sea, Lost on the Moon, Lost on an Island, etc.), all of which follow the same basic outline. This exercise is designed to examine group functioning and to show the superiority of group processes over individual decision-making. But it is also an example of a technique where an ideal world scenario, with no labor-management conflict and no possibility of collective voice, is used to draw lessons that are then transferred to the real world, even though they are not applicable to the workplace reality. Other examples include manufacturing simulations like building paper airplanes, making toast, making peanut butter sandwiches or constructing paper fans.

The following is a standard Lost in the Desert exercise:

Lost in the Desert

You and your teammates are passengers in a small plane flying from Los Angeles to Phoenix. It is July 16, 1988 at nine a.m. Suddenly the pilot announces that the engines are losing power and he thinks the plane will crash. The radio is out and he is unable to notify anyone of your position. Immediately before you crash, he announces that you are 85 miles south-southwest of the nearest known inhabited site, and that you are about 50 miles off course from the flight plan that he filed with the airport on departure.

When the plane crashes, the pilot is killed on impact. Only the passengers survive. Luckily, no one is injured. The plane catches on fire; before it burns, you are able to salvage only the 15 items listed below. All are in good condition.

Besides the information that the pilot gave you, you know that you are in the Sonora Desert. The area is flat and barren except for a few cacti. The weather report said that the temperature would reach 110 that day, which means a ground level temperature of 130.

All the passengers are dressed in light weight clothing - street shoes and socks, pants and short sleeved shirts, a handkerchief. You pool your money and find that you have \$103 in bills and \$4.57 in change. One passenger has a pack of cigarettes, a lighter, and a ballpoint pen. You have all said that you will stick together.

Your task is to rank the items below according to their importance to your survival. "One" is the most important and "15" is the least important.

Step 1:

Each member of the team works alone to rank each item. You will have 8 minutes for this step. Do not discuss the problem among yourselves, and do not change your individual rankings once the 8 minutes are over.

Step 2:

The team as a whole will rank the items. You will have 20 minutes for this step.

The items are:

- large flashlight**
- a small mirror**
- pilot's air map of the area**
- two fifths of grain alcohol**
- plastic poncho**
- cooking utensils**
- compass**
- silk parachute**
- salt tablets**
- gauze bandages**

gun and ammunition
knife
one quart of water per person
one overcoat per person
one pair of sunglasses per person

After participants have prioritized the items once as an individual and once in small groups, their responses are scored by comparing them to those given by desert survival experts. In practically all cases, the group response scores are higher than the individual ones. The clear lesson is that a group, working together, will do a better job of problem-solving and is more likely, by a significant margin, to "survive".

The implied lesson is that if only labor and management (or employees and management) would work together, all problems of the workplace could be solved and we could all survive in the desert (hostile environment) created by global competition.

It is important to see the power of the image of life and death in the Lost in The Desert exercise. Think of it: "We are lost in the desert of "competitiveness". If we don't cooperate and come to consensus, we will all die. And if anyone doesn't go along with the consensus, they are threatening the lives of the whole group." The message that cooperation is necessary in order to survive is clearly part of what your members are supposed to learn from this exercise.

This exercise operates with some important built-in assumptions - some of which are clearly stated and some of which are buried. These are critical to the message or lesson of the exercise and include:

- * Success and failure are easily measured. In this case you are either dead or not, there is no such thing as partial success or partial failure.
- * The measures of success and failure are agreed upon by all. Everyone thinks that living means success and dying means failure.
- * There is no possibility of differential impact - everyone is affected the same. The possibility that some people might live while others die is not allowed for.
- * Because everyone is affected the same, there is no possibility of betrayal (or incentive for betrayal). All members of the group are expected to only act in the interest of the

group. The individual interest is the same as the group interest.

- * There are no power relations within the group. No one can enforce their solution. Therefore individuals are forced to seek consensus or agreement.

Of course, none of these assumptions are true in real life. In the workplace (and especially in the changing workplace):

- * Success and failure are not easily measured and especially are not clear cut for unions. Unions are constantly balancing a wide range of issues, including protecting the long term viability and strength of the union. Successes in one arena often come in conjunction with losses in another.
- * Management measures success and failure differently than we do. For management, success is about profit and control, while we look at such issues as the quality of life for the members and the strength of the union.
- * There is always the possibility of differential impact. In fact, success for management often means failure for us. Management can be very successful at achieving their goals by moving work to another location, eliminating work through computerization or speeding us up.
- * There is therefore significant incentive for betrayal. Management can be “nice” for as long as they think it will help them, and then change without warning.
- * There are always power issues and relations between labor and management. They never go away.

Because the conditions are different in the workplace, the lessons of the Lost in the Desert exercise cannot (and should not) be simply transferred from the classroom into the real-life labor-management setting. This of course is never raised or discussed in the involvement session.

The exercise below is a rewrite of portions of Lost in the Desert that builds in the possibility of differential impact and therefore an incentive for betrayal. It also presents the possibility that power is significant within the group. By making relatively minor changes in the scenario (we’ve only changed the first and the last paragraph of the scenario), we greatly change the correct answers:

Lost in the Labor- Management Desert

You are on a small plane flying from Los Angeles to Phoenix. It is July 16, 1995 at nine a.m. With you is your spouse, your business partner and one other person who is a stranger to you but who seems to know your business partner quite well. Your business partner, who you know is a gambler and at times in debt, will inherit the whole business if you die. Your past history with your partner has been difficult at best and you suspect that he has stolen from the business and lied to you about expenses in the past. On this flight, he has been very friendly and talking a lot about building a trusting and co-operative relationship.

.....

Your partner and the stranger have fallen asleep. You and your spouse (who you love and trust) are discussing which items are most important to your survival and what to do with them. Your task is to rank the items below according to their importance to your survival. "One" is the most important and "15" is the least important.

In the standard version of Lost in the Desert, when power relations are irrelevant and differential impact is not possible, the gun is near the bottom of the survival list. However, when the possibility of betrayal is introduced, many people move the gun up to number 1. Their first instinct is to protect themselves against their “partner” by securing the gun (although some people prefer the knife). Once self-protection within the group is achieved, people can then think about how to make sure that everyone survives in the desert.

In the workplace, where management can always use its power to take things away from the members and where management is constantly thinking about how to increase its power, having a weapon, a source of power (in this case a strong, aware and united union) is crucial. Ignoring self-protection, ignoring union-building, can be a fatal mistake.

3) Consensus Decision Making

One of the lessons that is supposed to emerge from the “Lost in...” exercises is the importance of consensus-building and consensus decision-making. Many involvement programs use some form of consensus decision-making in joint labor-management deliberations. Although consensus decision-making is a very attractive process because it seems to be very democratic and seems to give union members veto power over any and all decisions, it can actually work to undermine collective action and weaken the union when used in a labor-management setting.

According to one labor-management booklet:

“Consensus has been reached when:

All group members agree on the decision though it may not be everyone’s first choice.

Everyone is committed to support the decision as if it were the first choice of all group members.

Everyone agrees that he or she has had sufficient opportunity to influence the decision”

One of the stated assumptions of the consensus process is that everyone enters the process as an equal, that everyone’s input is equally valid, that everyone has equal power. This leads directly to the unstated but crucial principle that everyone enters the discussion as an individual.

Because it treats everyone as an individual, the consensus process works against union members acting like a union. In doing so, it undercuts core union values and goals. Unions get their strength from the fact that they are a group, that they stick together. Consensus decision-making, like many other techniques discussed in this pamphlet, directly undercuts the union's cohesion, leaving people to speak and act as individuals. In limiting their ability to "act like a union" it tends to undermine their strength. In fact, caucusing, a key union activity, is often discouraged, if not outright banned, in a consensus process. Because consensus decision-making implies that everyone is equal and equally powerful – it tends to move us away from paying attention to union-building.

If a member disagrees with or has concerns about the direction the discussion is taking, rather than having the opportunity to check their disagreement with their union sisters and brothers, they are subjected to intense pressure to fold or to come up with an "acceptable" alternative. Divisions within the union are exposed to management, weakening the union and undermining solidarity.

The idea that people ever enter into a discussion with management as equals is of course ridiculous. The idea that we can ever safely enter into discussions with management as individuals is destructive of the union.

Another problem with the consensus process (or any other joint decision-making process for that matter) is that the scope of decision-making is often not well defined. The company has a great deal of leeway as to what it brings into the process, and what it reserves for itself. Decisions that it wants complete control over, or decisions that don’t require workforce knowledge and acceptance, can be reserved for management alone. Which decisions are presented to the consensus process and which

are reserved for management may well be more important than how the process itself is run. Questions that should be asked include:

Can anyone bring an issue to the consensus process?

Must management bring all issues to the process (or can they pick and choose and invoke management rights when they want to control the decision)?

What happens if consensus is not achieved, or if management doesn't get what they want?

Can the union insist that an issue be submitted to the consensus process (remember that even if we can bring an issue to the process, management has veto power)?

The way that consensus is applied in involvement settings often includes two other assumptions or operating principles:

- 1) that everything that happens in the room is secret; and
- 2) that all communications about the results come from the group as a whole (no separate communication from the union).

Following these principles tends to build the relationship with management over the relationship with union members – separating the union representatives from the members and undermining the union's specific role as representative of the members. It also surrenders the union's ability to critique an agreement with management. The union members on the committee are supposed to sell any decision to the membership as the best possible result, rather than as the best they could bargain at this point. Giving up the right to criticize is giving up the right to independent thought, independent action, and independent communication within the union.

Consensus is particularly dangerous because through the appearance of democracy it actually both strengthens and conceals the reality of management control.

Ideas for Acting Like a Union:

Don't agree to consensus rules.

Caucus - no matter what the consultant or management says.

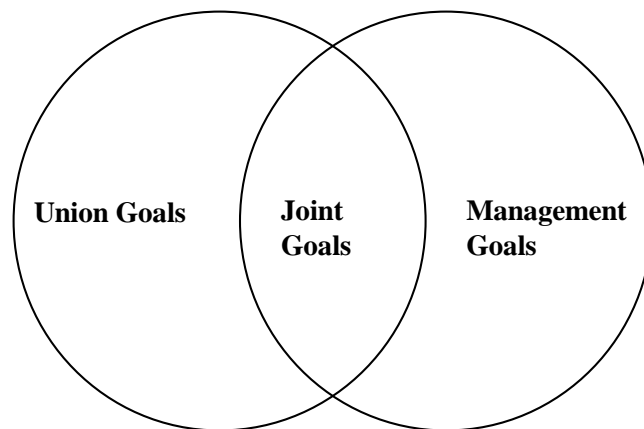
Create a series of signals, either hidden or open so that you can caucus during the meeting.

4) Common Goals, and the Rhetoric of Win-Win

As a couple of the examples above show, the rhetoric of common goals or “win-win” is a large piece of the involvement pie. In some programs, there is a general assumption of win-win (we all are better off at the end of the day), while others specifically and aggressively promote it. Many programs use a lot of common goals rhetoric but in reality where we are supposed to take it on faith that if management does well, the employees will also do well (“mutual success through competitiveness”).

The fundamental theory behind win-win is that labor and management have common interests which can be met if only we can get beyond our "bickering" - if we can set adversarialism aside and focus on “moving forward” to meet the challenges of the new economic reality. Many win-win supporters argue that in fact the area of common interest has grown because of increasing global competition, because of changing technology, because of an increased need for highly skilled workers, etc. Issues that are described as common interests include a safe workplace, keeping the worksite open (a profitable company), better quality, satisfied customers, a satisfied workforce, etc.

Common interests are typically illustrated as overlapping circles and participants are urged to focus on the achievement of joint goals.



While it may be true that, in certain situations, there are ways to achieve both management and union goals – for example increasing profits while improving job security and wages - this does not mean that there is a merger of interest between labor and management. Management continues to

pursue profit (and more profit) while labor needs to watch out for wages and job security (and should be watching out for the strength of the union). If union members become convinced that a merger of interest exists, they will naturally lower their defenses in dealing with management. They won't pay attention to union-building.

The bottom line is that in too many cases, so-called mutual interest really translates as management's interest.

Part of the problem is that our sense of our own interest, particularly in the arena of workplace change, is not well-developed. Too often we look at the short term impacts of changes while ignoring long-term impacts, and we fail to measure the impacts on the strength of the union and its ability to bargain in the future. We also have a tendency, because we have been on the defensive for so long, to evaluate the impacts of a change on the members and the union in relation to a "doomsday" scenario such as a plant shutdown or significant job loss. In this situation, if we come up with a "solution" that only cuts the workforce in half, we are supposed to see that as a win because there are still some jobs rather than none.

To what extent does management ever give something up that the union doesn't somehow pay for? A wage increase funded by speed-up, for example, is not really a concession on the company's part (unless you assume that they could have gotten the exact same speed-up without any wage increase).

Workers compensation and safety is an area that is often promoted as fitting the common goals construct. It is certainly true that high workers compensation rates are hurting companies, while workers are having their lives destroyed by injuries (and occupational illnesses that are rarely compensated). Presumably both labor and management have an interest in cutting accident rates. But we often see that companies try to cut the reporting of accidents rather than the accidents themselves, or they try to avoid spending money to improve conditions by blaming accidents on the workforce or they try to cut compensation rates by changing the law to lower benefits and tighten eligibility. The solutions that unions and management put forward are quite different because the problems they are trying to solve, and the underlying interests they are trying to serve, are really different.

5) Win-Win or Mutual Gains Bargaining

There are a whole series of techniques which build off of the common goals rhetoric and are referred to as win-win, mutual gains or interest-based bargaining. This approach to bargaining was

originally developed to deal with international, stalemate bargaining or hostage bargaining, that is bargaining in a situation where either side has significant destructive power (can "blow things up") but neither side has the power to move the situation to resolution. The idea is that the different interests of the parties can each be accommodated through a process of exploration and negotiation, and the assumption is that neither side wants to use their power to blow things up (this is the real "common interest" that exists in this type of bargaining).

But these days unions rarely have ultimate power in dealing with management. We are often forced into an accommodation of management's interests because of our lack of power, but this is very different from the rhetoric of common interests which is so much a part of the win-win approach. The main impact of the common interest rhetoric is to undercut the members' sense of independent union identity and goals and to re-direct the attention of the union from building power.

A commonly cited example of a win-win situation is where a company finds a different insurance company which gives the same benefits and costs less. Well that's great, but if there are in fact savings to be gained from changing insurance carriers, and these savings come without any negative impact on the benefits, shouldn't the union and the company negotiate over what should be done with the savings?

Many of the techniques associated with the win-win approach (focus on interests rather than demands, use small group techniques to jointly arrive at solutions, etc.) tend to undermine the union's independence and strength, while they don't similarly affect management. Joint investigation of issues, for example, can lead to a loss of clarity for the union about what the issue really is and what the union wants and it also gets the union members of the bargaining team used to sharing thoughts with management rather than with each other. This has the effect of breaking down solidarity in practice.

6) The Rhetoric of "Empowerment" and Choice

Like the mother in the cartoon below, many involvement programs seem to offer increased choice and decision-making authority to members, often described by terms such as empowerment or self-direction, while they are actually moving the union in a very clear, management-dominated direction. Unfortunately, as in the cartoon, the choices offered tend to be pre-constructed to meet the needs or goals of management. Empowerment was defined by the CEO of Harley-Davidson as, "Freedom within fences" and, of course, the fences are built by management. Management generally sets the boundaries of the discussion by deciding what the problem is and giving the criteria for an acceptable solution.

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE by Lynn Johnston



A careful reading of the empowerment rhetoric shows that the level of empowerment or worker decision-making that workers are allowed varies. The promise is that the employees can have as much empowerment as “they can handle.” And naturally, the way that you show that you can handle empowerment is by making decisions that meet management goals.

The following example shows how the empowerment process works to management’s advantage. A “team member” at an aerospace company was given a three-day suspension for poor work by management. When the team complained about the severity of the punishment, management turned around and “empowered” the team, saying, “Well then, you decide what an appropriate punishment should be.” The team came back with the suggestion of a one day suspension, which management accepted. While the team felt that they had won a victory by cutting the length of the suspension, in fact management had really won by getting union members to discipline each other and to accept management’s view of what is good and bad. Management in fact counts on union members self-censoring or “bargaining with themselves” and adjusting their proposals to what they think management will accept.

Questions that might be asked when confronted with the rhetoric of empowerment or choice include:

How does the appearance of choice, offered by the company, affect the ability of the union to bargain?

How does it affect the members' view of the union as their representative and themselves as active union members?

How much choice is the union (or are the members) actually given?

Do you have the information you need to analyze the real situation?

Do you have the time and resources that are needed to be independently involved?

Do you have the larger perspective necessary to avoid being trapped in the company's view of the situation?

Ideas for Acting Like a Union:

One local union refused to accept the self-directed label – calling their teams “indirectly supervised” instead of self-direct.

Push the limit of “empowerment” by making decisions that you don’t think management will go along with. Don’t “bargain with yourself”, bargain with management instead.

7) Building Personal Relationships/Lowering the Caution Flags

Most involvement programs have a significant component of building personal relationships among the labor and management participants, under the theory that "we used to be them and us, but now the 'them' that we have to be concerned about, the larger enemy, is the outside competition and that means that labor and management have to become a team, have to become an ‘us’."

The techniques discussed in this section are designed to downplay the institutional and representational aspects of peoples’ social role (their role as union representatives), pushing them to enter into the discussion as individuals (rather than as a union group) and to treat all other participants as independent individuals. The loss of identification as a union representative undercuts their ability to represent the members’ interests and is often accompanied by an increase in identification with the company and therefore with management. Treating management participants as individuals rather than as representatives of management leads union participants to lower their guard and leave themselves more vulnerable.

It is important to note that these techniques do not undercut management in the same way they weaken the union. Management's power simply doesn't come from unity in the same way that union's does. Management power comes from ownership, from the law and from their ability to make unilateral decisions about operations and investment. And to the extent that unity of purpose is important to management, it is simply imposed. Managers have to "unite" with upper management or lose their jobs. So what might seem like "equal treatment" on the surface, is really an attack on the core of unionism - unity.

Below are some examples of these personal relationship-building activities:

A) Getting to Know You Exercises

There are a whole series of exercises (often described as warm-up exercises or ice-breakers) that are used to promote individual and personal interaction. These often involve sharing personal insights, hobbies, family details, etc. While there is nothing wrong with knowing managers on a personal level, there is a problem when that personal knowledge gets in the way of union members recognizing managers as agents of management.

These exercises help disguise or bury the social and power relationships, and different goals, that exist in the workplace. They tend to make people forget who they represent and who and what management represents. When managers are dealt with as individuals, they become (symbolically) just another member of the problem-solving team, instead of direct representatives of the interests of management. The problem is that the real power relationships between labor and management are not changed even though the appearance is. This leaves the union even more susceptible to management pressure.

Ideas for Acting Like a Union:

Union members should introduce union members.

The focus of any introductions should be on peoples' union roles and values.

B) Seating

Many consultants will work to have union people sit at meetings interspersed with management. Sometimes you will walk into a meeting room and management has already taken seats spread throughout the room. Other times there will be assigned seats with union people alternating with management. This is part of moving away from "adversarialism" and breaking down the "them and us mentality". It is a way of making a statement that we are all "in it together" and have the same concerns and interests. It is supposed to remove artificial barriers to more natural interaction.

But when union members are seated inter-mingled with management, it removes an important physical symbol of unionism and union identity. It also makes interaction among union members more difficult. The "mini-caucus", when one union member leans over to another to ask a question or

discuss a point, is eliminated. Inter-mingled seating weakens union members' ability to act in unity and therefore undercuts union strength.

Spreading union members around the room also removes the process from a bargaining frame (it no longer looks like a bargaining session). This is important because the physical setup of the room provides signals for behavior. In a bargaining session, or a meeting that looks like bargaining, the union does many things to protect itself, its identity and its strength that simply become less natural and more difficult when people are dispersed.

Ask yourself: What if a member walked by the room while you were meeting with management, what would they see? If you are seated interspersed with management, they would not see a union and they might wonder what is really going on.

Ideas for Acting Like a Union:

Change seats to make sure that union folks are sitting near each other and across from management.

Make sure you set the "ground rule" of separate seating early in the process.

C) Casual Clothing

Many consultants will suggest that everyone wear casual clothes to joint sessions. The idea is that everyone can be more comfortable and the "artificial" divisions that are usually apparent due to differences in dress between labor and management will be "removed." It is critical to understand, though, that getting rid of the trappings of power (the symbols of power) without changing the reality of power does not equalize the discussion. It can however fool people about where power resides. For the union, this can lead to insufficient attention being paid to maintaining and building the power of the union.

Remember: A boss without a tie is no less of a boss.

Unity in the bargaining unit is in part created by common culture and experience in the workplace. This in turn stems from common social position. The fact that managers in many workplaces are referred to by their trappings (white hats, suits, ties, triangles, etc.) shows the importance of these as symbols of power and in creating a sense of unity within the union.

Ideas for Acting Like a Union:

Make sure that everyone from the union wears union insignia. Have people wear common clothes - all one color or the same union t-shirts.

D) No Titles

People are also often told not to refer to each other by titles. The elimination of titles is the same as the wearing of casual clothing. It is designed to give the appearance of equality and commonality, but again it does not change the substance of power relations.

Ideas for Acting Like a Union:

Have union folks refer to each other as sister and brother. Refer to company people by their titles.

E) Trust Building Exercises

At backwoods retreats, labor and management are sometimes asked to perform exercises designed to build team spirit and trust. An example is participants being asked to fall backwards off a wall, to be caught by management and union working together. The image is pretty powerful and clear: Learn to trust management and learn to seek safety through that trust. Understand that if labor and management are busy fighting each other, you will fall and hurt yourself. These lessons, learned in safe (and completely unreal) circumstances, carry a great deal of weight even when union members return to the real world of the workplace, and again can lead to union members letting down their guard.

Ideas for Acting Like a Union:

Remind managers of all the times they "dropped" union members in real life, and suggest that they are not ready for this exercise.

Drop management. Catch union members.

8) Off-Site Meetings

Involvement programs often utilize off-site meetings where union members and management

can get "outside the box" and practice working together with management, without "reality interfering". Getting away from the workplace removes union members from the symbols and reminders of the reality of work and of management control, things like whistles and the noise of machinery. It also removes them from the members. Lessons learned and behaviors practiced in seminar rooms tucked away from the real world, where they seem safe and harmless, can have a disastrous impact when carried back into the workplace, where they can seriously undercut the strength of the union.

Ideas for Acting Like a Union:

Don't agree to offsite meetings unless there is a specific advantage for the union

Think of ways to remind participants of the real world – for example by sticking to the lunch and break schedule that people have to adhere to at work.

9) Language

Language is a powerful force in our lives. The language that is used to discuss a problem can have a big impact on the definition of the problem and on the outcome of the discussion. Language has built-in values that may not be (and often aren't) our values.

Think about the following situation: A boss walks up to a union member and asks them to come to a **process improvement** meeting to discuss the work process - coffee and donuts, in the conference room, on work time. Many union members would say "Sure, what kind of donuts?" But what if the same boss offered the same deal but asked the member to come to a meeting to **bargain** over the work process, most members would say that the union has to be involved in any bargaining and would say no.

While both bargaining and process improvement involve labor and management sitting down to discuss what the future will look like, the different labels lead to very different approaches. There are several things (union-building things) that you would do (or should do) to get ready for a bargaining session that most people wouldn't do to prepare for process improvement. Process improvement also implies that someone has already decided (they've defined improvement) what the goal is, while in bargaining both sides come to the table with different goals that they want to achieve.

The phrases "joint decision-making" or "partnership" are also sometimes used instead of bargaining in describing the relationship between labor and management. These both carry with them a

feeling of equality and equal power which rarely if ever exists. Sometimes they are even called "true" or "equal" partnerships. Using these words only serves to lull people into a false sense of security.

In addition to the examples above, there is literally a whole new language that comes with the involvement movement. Paradigm, empowerment, coaches, Self-Directed Work Teams, etc. Why do consultants use a new language to discuss the labor-management interaction? In addition to moving unions folks outside a bargaining context, speaking in a new "language" tends to make people feel lost, dis-empowered and separated from their own sense of reality. People who have been to a country where they don't speak the language will recognize the feelings. They welcome any guidance about how to get around in the new land and are apt to be more trusting of an "expert" who can "translate" for them. In labor-management programs, the expert just happens to be a management-paid consultant.

There are two categories of words that are used in involvement programs that carry with them specific powers to confuse - smile words and frown words.

Smile Words

Words like "quality", "improvement" fit into the category of smile words. These are words that have a positive feel to them (that make you smile), but that often have a negative meaning (for the workforce or the union) as they are implemented in the workplace. We all, for example, believe in improvement. But in the workplace, continuous improvement really means continuous speed-up, and continuously fewer workers - which isn't good for us. The power of the smile words should not be underestimated. Salespeople are taught the importance of always asking a question so that the customer can answer yes. The positive feeling of saying yes flows over into the big question: Do you want to buy this?

Frown Words

Frown words are the opposite of smile words. They are words that carry with them an automatic negative feel. Waste is a good example. Who could be for waste? But when we look underneath the surface, we find that waste is defined so that it includes our coffee breaks, our lunch breaks and our ability to exert control over the pace of work. It is all of the little lulls in our work day (micro-breaks) which can make the day bearable. Eliminating waste is a program that too many union people are lured into without a real analysis of what waste is.

In examining an involvement program, we must always look at the language that is used - looking for new words that are unnecessary and looking for smile and/or frown words that are designed to misdirect the activities of our members.

Ideas for Acting Like a Union:

Always investigate the true meaning of words that carry built-in values and discuss them with the whole union committee.

Ask specifically what the company means by the words they use. For example, ask what is meant by improvement.

Distribute flyers to the members that challenge the company's use of words like improvement, empowerment, teams, etc.

When the word paradigm is used, have everyone put two dimes (pair of dimes) on the table in front of them.

Make up a buzzword bingo game card and have each member keep track of all of the buzzwords that management uses.

Write up a union glossary of management terms -giving the management meanings and the real meanings. Distribute it to all of the members.

10) No discussing contractual issues.

This is an example of what we call a false security - a "protection" which is negotiated into ground rules or joint agreements, sometimes even at the suggestion of management.⁵ It is agreed that the collective bargaining agreement shall not be discussed. Sometimes a person is appointed as the "contract monitor" to make sure that this is adhered to.

It is, of course, very important that joint committees not venture into contractual issues (although it is already true that they can't – only the union's bargaining committee can discuss modifying the contract with management). But the implication is that anything that isn't specifically covered by the contract might be open game for discussion within a team or committee. This means that, under the best case scenario, management is discussing (bargaining over) mandatory subjects of bargaining with the union, and non-mandatory subjects with the members individually. Under the worst case, only those issues that have already been bargained (that are in the contract) are reserved for the union, while all other issues (including mandatory subjects of bargaining) are "bargained" directly with employees.

⁵ For more information on and other examples of "False Security", see the Labor Extension Program's Fact Sheet *Avoiding False Security*.

Nothing in the work process can be changed without having some impact on the members, on the union and on bargainable issues. To say that there are changes that the union doesn't have to pay attention to is frankly ridiculous. Pace of work, skills, health and safety, work load, job descriptions and a wide range of other issues that are important to the union and the members can be brought into teams or committees without violating the "no discussion of contractual issues" rule.

With changes in technology and work processes creating new opportunities for management and new problems for the union, there are many, many things which are not covered by the contract but which the union should be bargaining over.

Ideas for Acting Like a Union:

Train union members about mandatory subjects of bargaining and about the union's role in bargaining over any changes in the work process.

11) Setting Ground Rules: Sticking to the Agenda - Using a Parking Lot

One of the key goals for an involvement facilitator is to maintain control over the discussion. One technique that is used to do this is putting a great deal of emphasis on sticking to the agenda and following "good meeting rules or ground rules." Since in many cases the involvement facilitator (with the help of management) has created the agenda, this ensures that the meeting moves in a certain direction. Another technique is to create what is called a Parking Lot (maybe a flip chart) where issues that arise that aren't on the agenda or that cause dissension between labor and management can be placed. This allows the facilitator to defer issues until later when people have been softened up and until the emotion of the immediate issue has died down.

Ideas for Acting Like a Union:

Don't let issues that are important to the union be put in a Parking Lot.

Don't accept the need to stick to the agenda when important issues arise or issues need more discussion..

12) Showing you a little bit at a time

A favorite trick of involvement consultants and management is to only reveal their plans a little bit at a time. This helps them maintain control, allows them to adjust to new conditions and prevents

the union from discussing the program based on an overall understanding of what it includes. This approach is also often used when new technologies, particularly new computer systems, are introduced. At first, only a few of the capabilities are used – allowing everyone to get used to the system. Later on down the road, other capabilities are turned on that have a more significant impact on the union members. This approach has been compared to a salesman trying to sell you a car by showing you the hub cap.

The incremental (only a little at a time) approach lets management introduce a program or a technology in steps, none of which is large enough that they raise a flag for the union. This approach also counts on the early steps softening people enough that they will be more accepting when the later steps are unveiled. Yet at the end, the union may come to realize (like the little girl in the cartoon shown earlier) that they have been tricked.

Ideas for Acting Like a Union:

It is important that the union ask to see the whole picture from the beginning. Submit a formal information request to management, using your rights to information under the National Labor Relations Act or relevant state labor law.

13) Emphasis on Facts and Data

Much of the rhetoric of involvement builds on the idea that facts and/or data are the only right way to make good decisions. W. Edward Deming, considered by many to be the father of the quality movement, is quoted as saying "In God we trust, all others must bring data."

We are told never to decide based on gut feelings or emotion, but only on data. But in many cases the data that is collected and presented tends to support (or push people to focus on) management goals. We rarely see management asking us to collect data on how much more workers make in many European countries or how long their vacations are or how much better their health coverage is. They don't ask us to collect data on how stress at work makes family life difficult and how forced overtime is affecting our kids. On top of this, many of the things that unions fight for, like respect and dignity, are human emotions and feelings which cannot be easily measured but are nevertheless important. The focus on data tends to exclude the issues that may be important to us.

The focus on data, and on the process of collecting data, is also designed to ease the transfer of knowledge and power from union to management. The key difference, from our perspective, between

skill and data is that skill is something we control and data is something they control. The implications of this for the strength of the union should not be ignored. Once they have gathered information about how our processes work, they no longer need us as much, which takes away from our leverage.

Ideas for Acting Like a Union:

Make the consultant use union issues when talking about data. Make graphs of hoow many times people have to go the medical department, how often vacation requests are denied, how many times people miss seeing their children because they are working excess overtime, etc.

14) Brainstorming

As discussed earlier, brainstorming sets up a situation where ideas (proposals) are put on the table before a union analysis of the idea can be made. While you may not be legally bound to respond to a proposal that has been brainstormed, the fact that an idea has been put on the table makes it harder to walk away from.

When a union bargains, issues are often packaged together in order to watch out for the whole workforce and for both long and short term and in order to win things that management doesn't want to give in on by linking them to things that management wants - basically saying to management: "You can't have this without that."

In a brainstorming session none of the packaging can take place. Ideas are presented before they are evaluated from a union perspective.

But the most important problem with brainstorming is that it encourages (and in fact requires) participants to act as individuals – it takes aim straight at the heart of solidarity and collective action.

Ideas for Acting Like a Union:

Don't do brainstorming with management.

Always caucus before a brainstorming session and come in with a united response.

15) The Power of the Magic Marker

A flip chart and magic marker are often used to record issues and points made during

discussion. But the facilitator has the ability to reinterpret ideas as they are written down. This is a significant trap of involvement programs. One of the worst examples we have heard of is when people were asked about their concerns and one union member responded, "Job security." The facilitator wrote down "competitiveness" and explained that competitiveness was the real route to job security.

Another problem with the flip chart is that it can become the "official" record of the discussion. This makes it even more important that the union participants make sure that their comments are properly recorded and that someone from the union is keeping an independent set of notes.

Ideas for Acting Like a Union:

Make sure that things you say are properly recorded.

Ask that a flip chart not be used or that a union member be allowed to do the recording.

Keep a separate set of notes for the union.

Conclusion

These are only a few of the tricks used by facilitators and the traps that the union can fall into in any kind of involvement program. There are several key lessons to remember:

Always know what the union stands for and wants (and make sure everyone in the discussion knows)

Always look carefully at the "problem" they want you to solve and make sure that the union's and the members' problems are on the table

Always questions the assumptions that are being made

Always challenge the language that is being used

Always find ways to **act like a union**.

Make it clear what the expectations are of anyone who is involved in a labor-management discussion. Develop a code of conduct for members.

And finally two key pieces of advice:

Never ignore your gut reaction to something a consultant or involvement facilitator is doing - if it feels wrong, it most likely is, and

Caucus early and caucus often.

If you have specific examples of the tricks and traps described above, if you have run into a trick or trap that is not included here, or if you have comments or suggestions, please send them along to Charley Richardson at the Labor Extension Program, University of Massachusetts, Lowell MA, 01854.

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