

WORKPLACE PARTNERSHIP –

A PARTNERSHIP IN OPERATION BETWEEN ASURE NEW ZEALAND AND THE NEW ZEALAND PUBLIC SERVICE ASSOCIATION

A Case Study Commissioned by the Partnership Resource Centre

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The purpose of this occasional paper series is to provide case studies and other publications to promote best practice and share experience in partnership approaches.

The views expressed in this occasional paper do not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Labour.

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Contents

1. Introduction, Purpose, and Background.....	4	5. Conclusions – Lessons and Reflections	24
Introduction.....	4	An organisation-wide approach	24
Purpose.....	4	Common ground.....	24
ASURE New Zealand.....	4	Personal and organisational	
The New Zealand Public Service		behaviour matters.....	25
Association (PSA).....	5	Leaders and champions.....	25
The Meat Industry – setting the context		Recognise organisational limits.....	25
for the ASURE/PSA relationship.....	6	Expect conflict	25
Method.....	7	Communication.....	26
2. Why Partnership? Motivations of		Identify the benefits of partnership	
the Partners	9	and market them internally.....	26
The PSA's motivations.....	9	Partnership is a practical relationship.....	26
ASURE's motivations.....	10	Concluding comments.....	27
3. The Building Blocks of Partnership for		Appendix 1: Template for Interviews	28
Quality at ASURE.....	12	Appendix 2: Acknowledgements and	
Partnership Protocol Agreement.....	12	List of Interviewees.....	30
A commitment to communication	13	Appendix 3: Glossary of Terms/Acronyms	31
Annual business plan.....	14	Appendix 4: ASURE New Zealand/New Zealand	
Partnership for Quality Dividend (PfQD).....	14	PSA Partnership Protocol Agreement,	
Partnership founded on establishing		September 1999	32
common interests.....	14		
Partnership respects independent			
points of view	15		
Strong personal and professional			
relationships.....	17		
4. The Impediments, Benefits, and Challenges			
for Partnership at ASURE	18		
Impediments in the Partnership for			
Quality relationship.....	18		
Positive benefits of Partnership for			
Quality.....	19		
Moving forward – what are the challenges			
for PfQ within ASURE?.....	22		

1. Introduction, Purpose, and Background

Introduction

This case study has been commissioned by the Partnership Resource Centre (PRC) which is part of the Department of Labour. The PRC has been established by the Government to help employers and unions build new positive workplace relationships based on workplace partnerships. Workplace partnership is about an active relationship between employers and unions which responds to change, builds capability, and improves performance, worker contribution, and the quality of the workplace for employees.

The concept of partnership recognises that it is in the interest of both employers and union members for their workplace to excel in what it does and as a place of work.

The underlying idea of a partnership is that there is something in it for all parties. This doesn't rule out conflict, but the idea is that parties work through disagreement in a way that will preserve the ongoing relationship.

Purpose

This case study is an example of partnership in action. It is not intended to be a template for how to implement partnership; rather it tells the story about why the New Zealand Public Service Association (PSA) and ASURE New Zealand (ASURE) decided that a partnership relationship could best assist them to meet their goals.

It documents the motivations of the parties in entering into a partnership agreement, their experiences over the past seven years, the tangible benefits achieved, and some of the challenges and issues still present as they move forward in the evolution of their partnership relationship.

It is hoped that the shared experiences of these parties may be valuable in informing other workplace partnership initiatives.

ASURE New Zealand

ASURE was established as a State Owned Enterprise (SOE) in November 1998, under the State Owned Enterprise Act 1986, as an outcome of the split of the Quality Management unit from the (then) Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF). SOEs operate as a commercial business but are owned by the State. They have boards of directors, appointed by shareholding Ministers to take full responsibility for running the business. Their function is to operate successfully as a business, as profitable as those not owned by the Crown.

ASURE's core business is the provision of ante-mortem and post-mortem meat inspection services to meat producers around New Zealand. Meat inspection is a food safety issue and involves assessing carcasses for diseases and defects.

In addition to its core business of meat inspection, ASURE also offers other products and services to the meat industry including:

- a range of audit products and services targeting food safety
- laboratory analysis services
- exotic disease and pest response
- tuberculosis testing
- stock movement control
- direct production processes
- industry related software products and services.

ASURE's work is prescribed by the New Zealand Food Safety Authority (NZFSA) in line with various international regulatory agreements and protocols. ASURE'S work is subject to inspection by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry Verification Agency (MAF VA), and its meat inspectors hold statutory warrants issued by MAF.

Meat inspection is mandatory for export meat production which constitutes over 85% of New Zealand's meat production. ASURE is currently the only provider of meat inspection services for export meat production. This enables ASURE to hold an effective monopoly for the provision of mandatory meat inspection services.

The governing international body for meat inspection activities is the Codex Alimentarius Commission¹ which, in 2005, is in the process of promulgating a new code of hygiene practice for fresh meat that will eventually lead to deregulation of meat inspection services. This

will allow meat producers in New Zealand to undertake their own meat inspection.

Despite progress arising from the Codex reforms, the effective monopoly that ASURE has will continue until such time as foreign governments, such as the United States, accept non-government controlled meat inspection for New Zealand's export meat products. Alternatively, competition could come from AgriQuality another state-owned enterprise that has extensive involvement in the New Zealand Meat Industry.

ASURE refers to the future time when it will face competition, including competition from its own customers, as "contestability". The business of ASURE is predicated upon the premise that its business must be structured to survive the introduction of contestability and mandated by the primary objective of an SOE to be commercially effective and viable.

The New Zealand Public Service Association (PSA)

The PSA is New Zealand's largest state sector union and one of the fastest growing unions in the country covering members in the Public Service, health services, local government, crown agencies, and private business.

1 The Codex Alimentarius Commission was created in 1963 by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) to develop food standards, guidelines, and related texts, such as codes of practice under the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme. The main purposes of this programme are protecting the health of the consumers and ensuring fair trade practices in the food trade, and promoting coordination of all food standards work undertaken by international governmental and non-governmental organisations.

The PSA is committed to the value of the Public Service and has argued that it should set an example to the rest of New Zealand in terms of good employment and industrial relations practice.

“The value and importance of public service must be restored and respected in New Zealand. The Public Service performs an extremely important role in New Zealand culturally, socially, economically, and environmentally. It is varied, dynamic, fascinating, and critical to people’s lives. We must restore the sense of worth to ensure that, politically, the Public Service will enjoy sustained support and that workers will find it an attractive work option in a global economy.”

June 2001 – Richard Wagstaff,
PSA Secretariat

The PSA’s stated objective is to build union organisation, so that it is able to influence the political, economic, industrial, and social environment in the interests of the PSA membership. Its membership goals include:

- better quality jobs
- improved management practices
- playing a major role in the rebuilding of quality services in New Zealand
- ensuring PSA members are involved and respected in their workplaces and that their members’ knowledge and contribution is valued.

In the late 1990s, the PSA promoted a new approach to industrial relations, a strategy for

achieving its goals and a quality public sector through partnership, called Partnership for Quality (PfQ).

The strategy is to work in partnership with employers who share the PSA commitment to satisfying and rewarding jobs for its members as an essential part of building strong public services. This is underpinned by a Partnership for Quality agreement at the workplace level, so that PSA members are directly involved in decision-making and share ownership of plans, issues, and problems with their employer.

The PSA considers that as an SOE, ASURE and its primary function of meat inspection services are a core part of the Public Service.

The Meat Industry– setting the context for the ASURE/PSA relationship

ASURE and its employees have to contend with a unique work arrangement. Meat inspectors are employed by ASURE, but work on other employers’ premises subject to the requirements of that company’s operation and overlaid by domestic and international food safety regulations that they must abide by and enforce. The hours of work are driven by the client company and are not prescribed by ASURE. ASURE management, with the exception of their immediate supervisors, do not work alongside their employees and are, in most cases, geographically distant. In any respect, these managers have severely curtailed control over their workforce because much of a meat inspector’s day-to-day work is outside their sphere of influence.

During the peak of the season, ASURE has approximately 975 employees. Of those, 49% are permanent full-time, 28% are seasonal with a duration of employment ranging from three to nine months, and 23% are casual staff. Close to 770 are members of the PSA and covered by the PSA collective agreement. They are employed by ASURE to work at 85 meat production sites, run by a mixture of large and small meat production companies, spread throughout New Zealand and involved in the annual processing of 50 million animals.

One factor to note is that the demographic makeup of the workforce has substantially changed in the last decade. More of the roles have become casual and this, combined with a tight labour market, has led to more women entering, what has traditionally been, male dominated work. Women now make up 40% of the workforce and this is reflected in a lower average length of service.

The nature of the role is also changing as some of the tasks previously undertaken by meat inspectors are now undertaken by meat workers. This trend will likely continue. This has led to growing concerns over the loss of skills within the role of meat inspection.

Meat inspectors work alongside meat workers who, unlike them, are directly employed by the client company. In the course of carrying out their work, meat inspectors have the ability to halt the work of meat workers. This can be a source of considerable tension, as it can impact on production which, in turn, can affect the production bonuses of meat workers, the client company's income and the income of the farmer supplying the animals.

At the heart of meat production is mass production technology structured around assembly-line work. A chain carries meat carcasses past a line of individual meat workers, each of whom carries out a specific set of cuts and operations. There are typically four meat inspectors on a chain. The chain moves at a constant speed requiring each worker to carry out their tasks on potentially thousands of carcasses per day. In addition to the monotony of this work, their physical environment has the added elements of death, blood, offal and viscera. It is a challenging and difficult working environment.

Method

This case study is designed to tell a story, so the primary focus was on letting individuals tell their own stories. A cross-section of ASURE's employees and PSA staff and members were interviewed. Interviews were undertaken using a series of questions, to prompt discussion and to gain their perspective on what partnership meant to them, their support for it, and their view of its level of success. There were 13 in-depth interviews with individuals from around the country, supplemented by an opportunity to have a free-ranging discussion with a group of meat inspectors during their tea break. It quickly became apparent that following the direction of the discussion was more productive than a rigid adherence to set of questions.

All the people spoken to happily shared their experiences in an open and honest way. There was considerable consistency between the themes emerging from their stories.

An initial draft report was submitted to the parties for their comments and feedback prior to the conclusion of the case study.

It is important to note that this case study did not have the scope to survey staff throughout ASURE's 85 worksites. However, this study did

have the luxury of referring back to a survey conducted in 2003 involving 92 ASURE survey respondents.² It is clear that the case studies anecdotal interview results aligned with a lot of the feedback in that survey.

2 The Partnership for Quality Review Research Report, March 2003, prepared for the State Services Commission and Public Service Association. These organisations commissioned NFO New Zealand to evaluate the implementation of Partnership for Quality and inform ongoing implementation work at five organisations including ASURE.

NFO New Zealand undertook secondary research, qualitative research and quantitative research. For the qualitative research, 11 in-depth interviews were undertaken. For the quantitative research, 400 questionnaires were sent out to PSA members at ASURE, with a response rate of 97 returns.

2. Why Partnership? Motivations of the Partners

ASURE CEO, Terry Pierson, relates a story about attending a meeting, at the invitation of the PSA, which was addressed by former Council of Trade Unions President, Ken Douglas. What struck Terry as being particularly relevant was a comment he made during this meeting.

“In particular, I remember the comments he made regarding the fundamental rationale of the PSA’s PfQ strategy. He articulated his belief that PfQ reflected the PSA and their members’ commitment to improving the performance of the Public Service, so that Government’s motivation for further privatisation due to poor performance would be significantly lessened.”

ASURE CEO Terry Pierson

Terry believes that making the business of ASURE more efficient became part of the common ground upon which partnership at ASURE could be based, even if the parties could not always agree upon the future direction required to achieve a more efficient business.

A PSA Organiser offered a more down-to-earth perspective on the need for partnership:

“If they didn’t have partnership they would have total chaos. Partnership constitutes the rules of engagement; without that, there would be war.”

Since the inception of partnership, one area that has continued to be of ongoing disagreement

between ASURE and the PSA is the possibility of contestability in the provision of meat inspection services. ASURE and the PSA have always disagreed about the desirability and/or inevitability of contestability being introduced into export meat inspection. The partnership agreement continues to both shape and be shaped by the different views that ASURE and PSA have on contestability.

The PSA’s motivations

The PSA’s motivations were entirely consistent with their union-wide strategy of Partnership for Quality, which was actively being pursued in the broader Public Service. The PSA saw the application of this strategy as the best opportunity in which to promote its objectives of:

- building union organisation and influence at ASURE
- maintaining a quality service with decent jobs retained in the Public Service and
- underpinned by improved pay and conditions and
- leading to increased employee job satisfaction.

Integral to the PSA strategy was to seek acceptance from ASURE that the union is a stakeholder with rights and interests in the plans, issues, and problems confronting the business. The PSA believed that ASURE would benefit through the collective participation of its employees, facilitated through the union, by harnessing employees’ knowledge and experience of their jobs and service delivery to maximise

organisational performance. The PSA advocated that the results would not only be better decisions, but also include ownership of those decisions by employees.

This approach involved a much wider understanding of the role of unions than simply being a bargaining agent or workplace representative, as prescribed under the Employment Contracts Act in effect at that time.

The PSA wanted a partnership involving a constructive union strategy which placed great importance on a “good faith” relationship. This was to be underpinned by respect between the parties, where it is understood that each party will have its own views on the way things should be done, and which will necessarily involve differences and at times conflict, within the context of an evolving and sustained relationship.

For the PSA, partnership supports a belief that employees want to work in successful workplaces that deliver quality services, that workers have pride in their chosen careers and understand that they will enjoy their work more, make a difference, advance their careers, and better serve the public in a functional, effective, and efficient organisation.

A second important and pragmatic motivation for the PSA and their members was that a commitment to improving the performance of ASURE was one way in which they sought to lessen the Government’s motivation for a further move towards privatisation of ASURE.

ASURE’s motivations

As it became an SOE, ASURE saw its principal objective to operate as a successful business

and be profitable and efficient as comparable to businesses not owned by the Crown. Some of its principal business drivers were to:

- avoid losing business
- save jobs and reduce the contingent redundancy liability and
- establish a system of corporate governance and management to control and reduce costs.

Of particular concern to ASURE was that if a deregulated and contestable meat inspection environment emerged, ASURE faced the loss of market share, as its customers would have a choice of meat inspection service providers. At that point, the Crown would potentially be exposed to realising up to approximately \$35 million in redundancy liabilities for meat inspectors. The aim, therefore, was to place ASURE on a commercial footing prior to contestability, so it remained a supplier of choice to the meat industry.

ASURE identified that its most significant overall priority for the business was to urgently bring its costs into line with a theoretical market competitor. ASURE is an asset-poor business because, as a service provider operating on other companies’ premises and as a former government department, it had not been required to build up an asset base. ASURE’s staff are its primary asset. The flipside to this is that the front-line meat inspector labour cost constitutes over 95% of the total cost of meat inspection. Therefore, the primary focus of cost reduction for ASURE was the restructuring of the employees’ collective employment contract (CEC).

ASURE was aware that the achievement of these objectives would require generational change from the perspective of both meat inspectors

and the PSA. ASURE was also aware that its objectives could not be achieved in a timely or cost-effective manner without the support of staff and the union which represented the great majority of them.

ASURE has stated that the ultimate aim of

the Partnership for Quality protocol is for the employer, union and employees to work together constructively in such a way that stakeholders will benefit in an appropriate allocation of any benefits which may subsequently arise from an improved financial performance.

3. The Building Blocks of Partnership for Quality at ASURE

The written partnership protocol between the PSA and ASURE is an important document that crystallises the understandings they have reached. The protocol is the outcome of a developing relationship that commenced at ASURE's inception and was cemented through the process of negotiation for the first collective employment contract. It was this first CEC, reached between ASURE and the PSA, that identified and agreed on the need to address the cost structures of the new business. In reality, the organisational relationship and what it means is based on the personal relationships formed between key people within each organisation that predated the written agreement.

ASURE CEO, Terry Pierson and Ian Baldick, PSA National Organiser for ASURE, both commented on the strength of personal relationships in the development and maintenance of their organisations' partnership relationship.

A relationship characterised by:

“Complete honesty underpinned by transparency and respect.”

ASURE CEO Terry Pierson

Partnership Protocol Agreement

Partnership for Quality was introduced during a period of tremendous change for ASURE. As ASURE became an SOE, its employees had to adapt to a very different environment from that which they had become accustomed to over many years. This was accompanied by changes to structures and systems, reductions

in staffing levels, and significant changes to their employment conditions, including long-held entitlements to penal and overtime rates.

Against this backdrop, ASURE became the first SOE to sign up to Partnership for Quality with the PSA in September 1999. (Appendix 4)

The essence of the protocol agreement is embodied in the Collective Agreement (CA) reached between ASURE and the PSA:

ASURE/PSA Partnership for Quality

ASURE and the PSA had entered into a partnership protocol agreement dated 27 September 1999. While the partnership protocol agreement remains in force, ASURE and the PSA and the PSA's members agree that they will comply with the sentiments of the Partnership Protocol Agreement in carrying out their obligations under this CA. These sentiments include the following:

ASURE, the PSA and the PSA's members value the relationship in which they work together in a consultative and problem-solving manner to resolve issues, to improve the quality and efficiency of the provision of ASURE's services and its financial viability, and to improve the quality of ASURE's processes.

ASURE's business viability and the quality of employment of employees can be enhanced by the parties working together in partnership.

ASURE recognises the PSA as an independent organisation which is to be a representative and leader of its members, as a partner in its business bringing a collective benefit. The PSA

recognises that it can adequately represent the best interests of its members in ASURE only by contributing to the achievement of ASURE's strategic business plan and positive working relationship with ASURE's management.

The parties recognise that the environment within which ASURE operates is changing as a result ASURE must improve its processes, introduce new business and upskill staff.

ASURE is committed to providing the PSA with information required for the PSA officials to be effective business partners.

ASURE and PSA are committed to open, timely and constructive communication, and to following the ASURE/PSA Communication Protocol.

It effectively summarises the nature of the parties' relationship and places it at the heart of the ASURE/PSA Collective Agreement. This legally enforceable CA plays a central role in the parties' relationship. The CA operationalises how partnership works in practice at over 85 different worksites. The consistent application of the agreement is fundamental to both parties. As a consequence of this, a lot of issues that relate back to the agreement get dealt with at senior levels between the ASURE and the PSA.

A commitment to communication

The ASURE/PSA Communications Protocol signed in 2000 describes the means by which the parties will communicate on all issues affecting the partnership. This includes commitments to two important principles:

- the parties' relationship is underpinned by a commitment to no surprises which is achieved through open and regular communication on matters which affect the interests of the parties

- the parties will use problem-solving methods to promote the speedy resolution of problems by participative methods, with the aim of avoiding industrial stoppages and minimising litigation.

In addition to communication around the business plan, the day-to-day implementation of the PfQ requires communication at a number of levels within ASURE and the PSA. Each issue is dealt with according to its strategic importance and there are guidelines indicating who should be involved with various issues. For example, PSA regional delegates and ASURE Account Managers deal with general HR issues. When issues relating to the interpretation of the collective agreement are unable to be resolved by the Account Managers, then the CEO or the CEO's direct reports deal with it.

Greater understanding between the parties is facilitated by effective communication systems that ensure open and consistent communication that can be easily read by staff. Examples include the following:

- staff and PSA see the same business plans
- delegates receive the same presentations as managers, on the same day
- there is a signoff system whereby managers obtain signatures from staff to say they have read the ASURE weekly bulletin
- there is access to email by all staff through their site computer.

Part of the formal structure of the partnership framework that both parties commented on as working well was the quarterly review meetings of the PSA and ASURE to discuss issues. An environment has been created that allows "free and frank" discussion, with an emphasis on resolution of any issues that may arise.

The ASURE weekly bulletin has become a vehicle for two-way communication and action. Not only is every effort taken to get staff to read the bulletin, but a section on the bulletin also asks for their feedback. This feedback is then collated with appropriate action points for ASURE managers and provided to the CEO for his overview. In turn, this is provided to the ASURE board members for their information.

At the site level, communication between supervisors and PSA delegates is also working well. This is due to the positive work relationships that many of the supervisors enjoy with the staff, underpinned by the requirement within their position descriptions to liaise with the union.

Annual business plan

ASURE develops an annual business plan outlining its activities for the coming year. The content of the business plan is then presented to the PSA who are apprised of business plan progress with quarterly updates. ASURE shares the content and progress reports with the PSA, in order that the PSA and its members understand the strategic direction of ASURE and their particular role in it.

Partnership for Quality Dividend (PfQD)

An important feature of the PFQ agreement, one that is integral to the ongoing support for the agreement, is the Partnership for Quality Dividend (PfQD). This is paid out in conjunction with the settlements of the collective agreement to PSA staff members only.

ASURE has acknowledged that the PfQD rewards the high level strategic work that the PSA does

as the union in the context of the PfQ and the considerable benefit brought to ASURE through the PSA's collective representation of the vast majority of staff.

The PfQD recognises the historical and future benefits accruing from the positive approach PSA members have taken, and continue to take, with ASURE. ASURE and the PSA have structured this mechanism to reward PSA members who have demonstrated a commitment to add value to the development and application of core meat inspection activities. It is a premium payment over and above the standard pay for a meat inspector as it recognises their contribution in addition to the requirements of the meat inspection role.

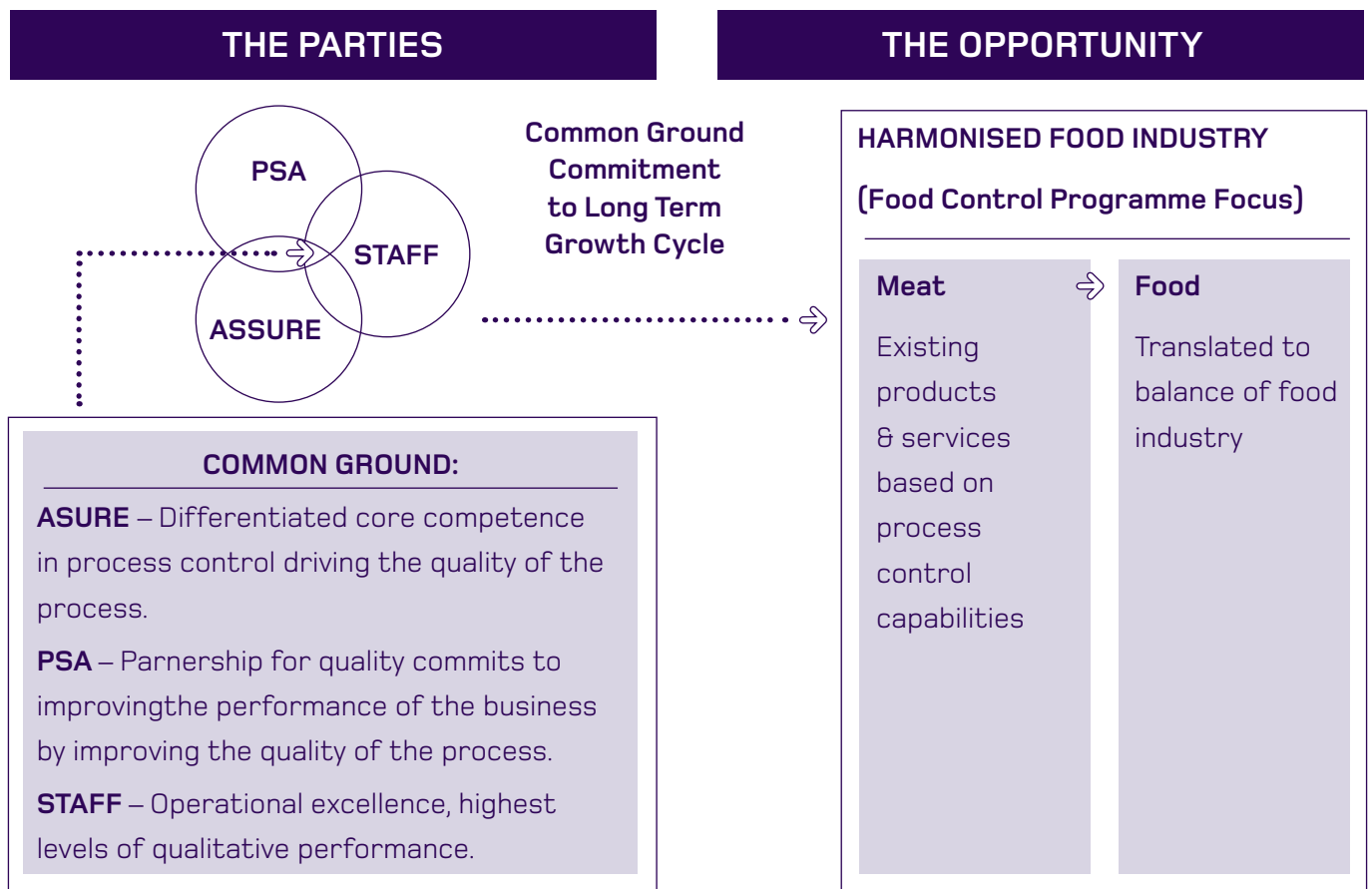
For ASURE, it has the added benefit of moving remuneration discussions, in the context of the collective agreement, away from CPI increases only.

Partnership founded on establishing common interests

A vital principle and a practical foundation upon which the partnership between ASURE and the PSA has developed is that common ground was found. This enabled the parties to work together for the overall benefit of the business and the employees. It involves the employer and union working constructively together in ways that can "grow the cake" by adding value and/or reducing costs.

This synergy is reflected in ASURE's philosophy of process improvement with the PSA's philosophy of improving the quality of the business by improving the quality of its processes. It is illustrated in the following schematic.

PARTNERSHIP FOR QUALITY STRATEGY ALIGNED TO BUSINESS STRATEGY



Partnership respects independent points of view

The functional relationship between the parties is built on the principle that the parties need not agree on everything. It recognises that the parties often have wide differences of opinion on major strategic issues. There have always been considerable strategic differences between ASURE and the PSA which are openly acknowledged. How they deal with these philosophical differences is a pointer to why the relationship succeeds. Neither party is trying to change the other parties' fundamental beliefs, as these are respected. Communication is aimed at gaining a greater understanding of each other's

beliefs and positions so as to continue the search for common ground.

"Partnership creates relationships that can support resolution or discussion of issues. We can discuss different views with organisers and determine the best way forward. Partnership provides a framework that takes a lot of emotion out of decision-making. Using the collective agreement as a starting point, we map out a dispute or problem and its potential outcomes without having to carry out the steps. It avoids dead-ends."

Senior ASURE Manager

The issue that has always existed and separates the parties like no other is contestability. ASURE favours the deregulation of meat inspection activities leading to competition, while the PSA opposes the need for contestability.

These conflicting viewpoints are often reflected in a range of different positions adopted by the parties on what may first appear to be unrelated issues. The parties have acknowledged that a current issue relating back to contestability has emerged that forms the backdrop to CA negotiations in 2005, and it may be the most significant challenge to the partnership relationship since its inception.

The issue concerns whether meat inspectors will be required to give up their current access to separate washroom and tearoom facilities at one North Island plant. The plant has been extensively refurbished. The meat company client says that it will not provide separate facilities for the meat inspectors in the new plant.

Both parties can articulate passionate and compelling arguments for their respective positions and for why change should occur or should be opposed.

The PSA asserts that separate facilities are the cornerstone to the independence of meat inspectors and their ability to carry out their duties, without recrimination from meat workers employed by the companies. A number of meat inspectors stated that, in carrying out their functions, they were policing the industry, so that they needed a space away from those workers whose work they checked.

ASURE argues that meat inspectors are required to comply with the regulatory standards laid down by the NZFSA which does

not require separate facilities. Further, it is an on-site contractor and cannot compel client companies to provide separate facilities, and that the underlying issue is the parties' different views about what meat inspectors are and what they will be. ASURE's view is that:

- meat inspectors used to be the police, but now MAF VA are
- meat inspectors look for diseases and are focused on the product and not the processes and
- the direction that NZFSA is going in means that companies can inspect their own products, provided that they are accredited as a competent authority.

The PSA express a view that if they relinquish having separate facilities, they are going to go down the path of further deregulation which ultimately they perceive as a threat to both the quality and security of jobs. Seen in this light, the current issue is a flashpoint in the ongoing argument around contestability. It also reflects continuing concerns from the workforce regarding a loss in conditions of employment and perceived attacks on their status.

"It is a test of the partnership relationship and the biggest issue confronting the relationship so far. There is no obvious win/win."

Senior ASURE Manager

"The PSA position is that they will not sign a new collective until the issue is resolved."

Senior PSA Official

The dispute is progressing on a number of fronts, all featuring open lines of communication. At the initiation of ASURE, the parties have been before the Employment Relations Authority and the Employment Court. It has also become the most important claim from the PSA to retain separate amenities during the renegotiation of their collective agreement.

At senior levels of both organisations, there is no evidence of animosity regarding this issue. There is mutual acceptance that the dispute has crystallised the arguments of contestability that have always existed. ASURE understands that contestability is an anathema to the PSA, because they are advocating for the retention of meat inspection services under the Public Service. ASURE understand that the PSA cannot accept this change to contestability.

Despite the strength of feelings, both parties remain committed to working through the issue and hold firm to their belief that Partnership for Quality is effective in managing this dispute.

The PSA President said that, regardless of the dispute, the business of ASURE and Partnership continues, irrespective of how the issue

progresses. He said that the relationship is not in suspension, that it continues unabated, and that energy is already focused on how the relationship will develop after this issue is resolved.

Strong personal and professional relationships

A feature of the partnership is the strong personal and professional relationship between the organisations and among their leaders. There is mutual respect for one another at senior levels of both ASURE and the PSA that facilitates PfQ within ASURE. Senior ASURE management and senior PSA officials are accessible and approachable to each other. There is a clear understanding from each, of their own and each others' roles, and active communication and engagement is present in all aspects of their business together.

Key senior PSA position holders at ASURE are greatly valued by ASURE senior managers because of their level of knowledge and ability to think strategically. Senior PSA organisers are also respected for their individual capabilities and the value they can bring to the business.

4. The Impediments, Benefits, and Challenges for Partnership at ASURE

The interview participants were asked to reflect upon the last seven years of partnership:

- what they believe has adversely affected the development of partnership
- what they perceive as some key benefits that have flowed from it and
- the challenges partnership at ASURE will face in the future.

The following are some of the key themes that emerged.

Impediments in the Partnership for Quality relationship

- i. A significant complexity in the partnership relationship is the 85 worksites, over which partnership at ASURE operates, and their geographical dispersion. The success of partnership is dependent upon the people who live and breathe it, and so there are significant opportunities for different, yet valid, perspectives about what partnership has achieved and means.
- ii. A clear consensus exists that the partnership between ASURE and the PSA operates well at the senior levels. However, the understanding and application of partnership is reduced at the lower levels within ASURE and the PSA and is not embedded at the site level.

“There are concerns about partnership all the time. There are perceptions among staff about what’s going on behind closed doors. Partnership is a give and take approach. We give too much.”

PSA Member

- iii. Aligned to the understanding of partnership at the site level are new emerging tensions as a result of cultural change in management. A new class of managers from ASURE’s university graduate programme have taken on the positions formerly held by meat inspectors who had previously followed the traditional path from the shop floor. It was the view of some in the PSA that these new managers did not always have the traditional affinity with the culture of meat inspectors, and that this was, on occasions, affecting communication and the development of the relationship at the site level.

“Management has changed dramatically. It used to be that people left school and became meat inspectors. Now there is no movement from meat inspectors to management. They come from a business perspective. Management don’t have a perception of what we do. The work culture has changed as well. It has been hard to get used to change. This has a bearing on partnership because they are not in touch.”

PSA Member

- iv. ASURE’s response was that meat inspectors do not apply for positions as area managers and that the tensions were reflective of age differences with younger managers dealing with a still considerable number of older, longer-serving, meat inspectors. It should

also be noted that staff employed after the buyout of conditions in 1998 did not have the same strongly held opinions in this regard.

- v. There was a shared view from both organisations that union members and lower level managers do not always have the big picture about what has happened in other plants, or what agreements and precedents are in operation elsewhere.

“Internal structures within the PSA don’t necessarily allow issues to be resolved at the lower-level. This might be as a consequence of trying to ensure consistency of outcomes.”

ASURE Manager

- vi. At a site level some members felt that decisions were made without input from employees.

“There is no consultation at the shop floor level.”

PSA Member

In reality, these comments reflect a trade-off in the parties having established processes in place to ensure that issues aren’t left to meander at a site level but are quickly dealt with at higher levels by individuals in both organisations with the authority to make decisions. Nonetheless, the lack of awareness of this process and its effectiveness remains an issue.

- vii. Some PSA delegates and members cannot embrace a wholehearted commitment to the Partnership for Quality principles. This can reflect beliefs that management and staff should be in opposition and conflict if the union is doing its job. One PSA member neatly encapsulated the grudging acknowledgement

of the reality of partnership, but the equivocal support it has at the site level.

“Partnership was born with ASURE. We can’t go back. I would prefer to not have the restrictions of having to consider the company’s issues all the time.”

One lower level ASURE manager expressed their concern with partnership also.

“ASURE is overly sensitive and, as a consequence of partnership doesn’t take a firm line when it should.”

- viii. At the site level, more is required to enhance the understanding of where ASURE and the PSA are going and to facilitate discussions and understanding of each side’s perspective, in order to enable a resolution of issues as they emerge.

Positive benefits of Partnership for Quality

The positive benefits of Partnership for Quality are many and varied ranging from the strategic benefits that allow both organisations to develop and grow, to the operational benefits that enable them to work together for mutual gain and the resolution of problems.

- i. ASURE has acknowledged the considerable strategic benefit that derives from ASURE being recognised internationally as operating the most advanced and sophisticated meat inspection service in the world. Recognition is based upon ASURE’s process control system which relies upon checking a percentage of the total kill to assess the decisions made by the meat inspectors on the chain.

ASURE credits the PSA's co-operation as instrumental to the functioning of this system and points out that this ongoing demonstrated joint commitment to quality of process has created the potential for improvements in profitability during the medium to long-term. This potential is based partly on opportunities for ASURE to sell its services offshore to other meat inspection agencies.

"ASURE's meat inspection services are now recognised as the benchmark for best practice in the world. The development of the ASURE operating system, Pi3 MasterCube and the statistical process control search system featuring Pi3 BenchMarks would not been achievable on a cost-effective basis, or in a reasonable timeframe, without PSA members' positive and active support."

ASURE's CEO Terry Pierson

- ii. PSA President, Keith Gutsell, said that partnership had enabled the PSA to have and maintain their own independent point of view and to be involved at a strategic level of ASURE. ASURE support for PSA participation is demonstrated by the level of inclusion in all aspects of planning and HR matters.
- iii. The PSA has identified that partnership and the practical support for PSA member involvement has enabled the PSA to build and resource its organisation more effectively. ASURE recognises the union's role in health and safety, industrial matters and planning. It provides active support for delegate release and participation in PSA activities,

including paying for their flights to attend PSA meetings.

"Overall, partnership has been beneficial – beneficial to the PSA because ASURE has supported and paid for regional meetings and this has resulted in a strengthened and more united approach."

PSA Delegate

- iv. On an operational level, benefits have been identified that included:
 - the creation of the National Certificate in meat inspection
 - the completion of the rewarranting of all existing meat inspectors in mid-1999
 - increased efficiencies in ASURE's management structures and
 - effective dispute resolution processes.
- v. Partnership has resulted in new or improved negotiated benefits for PSA union members. These include:
 - the PfQ Dividend
 - salary increases
 - paid meal breaks
 - increased benefits for relieving
 - weekly staff communication bulletins and operations meetings
 - management and PSA briefings
 - implementation of a comprehensive labour management manual, specifying policies and procedures for all employment matters and
 - the implementation of a detailed nationwide health and safety manual.
- vi. The PfQ agreement has been an essential factor in the maintenance of ASURE's head office overheads at very low levels with only 20 staff. This includes ASURE's reliance on

one and a half Human Resource positions for ASURE's 975 employees, when the standard practice in New Zealand business is one Human Resources manager per 120 employees. It was also evidenced by ASURE's ability to reduce its middle management meat inspection staff during the period that the PfQ has been in operation. These changes to levels of management have only been possible because the partnership agreement assists and supports ASURE achieving consistency in its management practices between worksites. The collective agreement sets the basic rules and framework for how the parties maintain this consistency. The adherence to this document ensures this consistency.

vii. This levelling of the management structure has been balanced by processes in the relationship that has fostered easy access by either party at the highest levels within the respective organisations. In particular, the PSA stressed the importance and benefit of the strong presence of ASURE's CEO which extended from leading the collective agreement negotiations, to being personally available for direct access at any time by senior officials within the PSA. Since then, this has been further strengthened by the ability of senior PSA officials to be able to address the ASURE board directly on matters of concern to them.

viii. This ease of access also supports a very positive approach to conflict resolution which, in turn, helps to generate increased efficiency for the business. As a consequence of the PSA being more involved operationally, higher levels of understanding have been created regarding issues that could potentially be a source of conflict. PSA delegates are now

routinely trained in skills required for dispute resolution. Plant supervisors' training also includes learning about conflict resolution and win/win as part of their partnership. So, when conflict does occur, there is a greater emphasis on a resolution of issues at the worksite level.

"Members are committed to the job; they respect the job and what they are doing. They stand by every decision even when it is as a result of compromise."

PSA Delegate

ix. However, ASURE and the PSA cannot always agree and there is a healthy use of the Department of Labour's mediation services. What has changed under partnership is that fewer issues go to mediation and the parties use the Partnership for Quality principles within mediation to assist a resolution in a constructive manner. At the outset of each mediation, there is a formal discussion of Partnership for Quality which helps to ensure that the parties' behaviour is reflective of the commitments they have made.

"Partnership encourages dialogue. It makes it easier for ASURE to manage their business. There have been no major disputes since ASURE was formed."

PSA Delegate

x. The virtual dispute might best characterise how the parties bring together their unique combination of honesty, transparency, and a "no surprises" agenda. Even when the issue is as fundamental as contestability, the parties will openly discuss their options to advance

their respective position within the dispute – including how they might resort to the full range of legal or industrial action. Both the PSA and ASURE commented how they would walk each other through the steps of a dispute and detail how each would respond to the other side's next move. This was not done with any hint of malice – rather it reflected a genuine desire to understand each other's position and avoid unnecessary conflict based on confusion or uncertainty. The success of the strategy has been that there have been no organised work stoppages during ASURE's history.

- xi. Fundamentally, ASURE and the PSA are able to work together despite differences of opinion. There is a maturity about their relationship that enables this to occur without compromising their organisations' independence and principles.

Moving forward – what are the challenges for PfQ within ASURE?

It needs to be acknowledged at the outset that this is a fundamentally strong workplace partnership which is functioning very well. There are also natural limits to how deeply you can draw everybody in a workforce of 975 individuals into the same level of understanding and participation. So, putting to one side this qualification, there are some areas that ASURE and the PSA might be able to focus on and improve in order to help strengthen their partnership relationship.

- i. A focus for both parties could be to increase the knowledge and understanding of partnership amongst members and area managers, with the aim of increasing the levels of active support and actively selling the

benefits in an ASURE context.

- ii. A lot of staff do not understand the values that underpin partnership and only have a practical awareness of it when it directly affects them. They are positively reminded of it when they receive the partnership dividend in connection with the collective agreement settlements. On the other hand, partnership tends to be blamed by some of the workforce when problems or disputes are not resolved in their favour.

“Partnership impacts to the extent that they have to comply with decisions that were made.”

PSA Delegate

In addition, pre-1998 employees are cautious about the change from a conflict model to a mutual gains model of engagement with their employer. Many are still not entirely sold on partnership and remain negative and cynical.

- iii. Trainees who will be tomorrow's meat inspectors, seemed to be ignored in relation to partnership by both the PSA and ASURE until they have completed their training:

“There is nothing on the noticeboard that highlights the role of partnership. Trainees are not spoken to by the PSA about partnership. I don't know if they are introduced to partnership as part of their training or if resources on partnership are handed out.”

PSA Delegate

This is a lost opportunity to inculcate future employees in the benefits of partnership. It could be remedied by a concerted effort by the PSA to inform trainees and new PSA

- members about the principles of Partnership for Quality. This could be assisted by specific training by the PSA for new members and by ASURE for managers in how to support the partnership relationship.
- iv. The partnership relationship works well at a strategic level. The area of difficulty and disjuncture is at the level of middle management and delegates/members. Members do not necessarily see the strategic benefits of partnership or place a high value on them. Conversely, any dissatisfaction with workplace disputes is attributed to partnership not working. The PfQ dividend is a tangible benefit that members can easily relate to. For this reason, it is important, but so are the intangible benefits of partnership such as worker participation and influence. These need to be more effectively communicated as being a direct result of having a partnership agreement between the PSA and ASURE.
 - v. For area managers in particular, clarifying for them the importance of the partnership relationship and requiring them to have regular meetings with delegates in their area of responsibility might help to break down concerns held by some PSA members that area managers do not understand the work of meat inspectors.
 - vi. The PSA have acknowledged that the partnership agreement needs more front-line members involved. This can be supported by the PSA adding emphasis to the responsibilities of a delegate to include advocating the benefits of partnership. Delegates can be the greatest resource for both organisations in promoting the success of partnership. ASURE has its part to play as some delegates commented that they were unaware of whether the company valued their skills as a delegate, as there was no structured feedback.
 - vii. Communication at a strategic level may be enhanced by building upon the recent initiative of senior PSA officials engaging with the ASURE board through planned regular meetings.
 - viii. A challenge for both parties is how to devolve problem-solving, balanced against maintaining the success of the current problem solving methods. Combined training in problem-solving for management/delegates/members at a local level (with a focus on the partnership relationships) would be beneficial.
 - ix. One development that might be a significant threat to PfQ at ASURE is a major organisational restructure. The possibility remains of a merger between ASURE and AgriQuality. This would be a fundamental challenge to partnership, as it currently stands, and would require the PSA to reset the parameters of its partnership agreement with any new organisation.
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5. Conclusions – Lessons and Reflections

The PSA and ASURE have developed a workplace partnership that is strong and relevant and grounded in the practical realities of the challenges confronting ASURE and its workforce. It enjoys huge personal and organisational commitment from senior managers and officials in both organisations. Most importantly, it delivers a mix of tangible and intangible benefits to its stakeholders.

Conducting a case study on ASURE as an SOE is particularly interesting as it represents a business that is a crossover between the public and private sectors. It shows that a union, such as the PSA, operating with a public services ethos and a commitment to quality services, quality jobs, and worker participation and contribution, can be entirely relevant within an essentially private business sphere, where the primary function is to run the business on a profitable commercial basis.

Conversely, it demonstrates that business and its goals can be better served by active engagement, a focus on quality and productivity, worker participation, and acknowledgement and encouragement of collectivism through unions.

There are some important lessons and reflections that will help any organisations that are embarking upon a partnership relationship, as described below.

An organisation-wide approach

- i. Partnership has to be embedded in the total relationship of the organisations entering into a partnership agreement. It does not

work if it only functions in narrow parameters of the relationship; for example, if it is only concerned with disputes but not strategic engagement. Partnership must also be shaped by the parties to reflect their unique work environment.

- ii. ASURE is an organisation that has opened itself up to partnership in all facets of its operation, from its board of directors down to its 85 worksites. This approach builds confidence and trust and removes what could otherwise limit the development of mutual gains.

Common ground

- i. At the outset of partnership, it is important to establish common ground on which the relationship can be founded. Common ground does not preclude certain fundamental differences between the parties. Recognition of each other's legitimacy is essential. Indeed, it is critical that each party recognises the independence of the other to hold legitimate and independent views on the way things should be done.
- ii. Partnership motivations can differ, but there has to be an intersection at which there are some mutually desired outcomes, and where some of these outcomes are achieved.
- iii. ASURE and the PSA hold fundamentally different views about the most significant strategic issues of contestability and organisational structure. Where their interests meet is a commitment to growing the cake and ensuring the benefits are fairly distributed between stakeholders.

Personal and organisational behaviour matters

- i. Partnership is built on people's relationships and the expression of personal values in organisational behaviour: honesty, trust, integrity, and good faith. In the broadest sense, these values are critical to workplace relationships. Organisational co-operation is built on the strength of these personal relationships.
- ii. At ASURE, these relationships are central to the confidence each organisation has in the other. Put simply, the senior people within ASURE and the PSA trust each other.
- iii. Partnership is not a contest where one party, over time, seeks to achieve dominance by co-opting the other to its belief structure. Rather, it is an opportunity to gain a greater understanding which can serve as a foundation for more extensive co-operation in areas of common ground.

Leaders and champions

- i. Partnership requires leaders and champions at all levels of an organisation, but particularly those with authority and access to resources to drive the vision through.
- ii. At ASURE, these champions have been ASURE CEO, Terry Pierson, and PSA National Organiser, Ian Baldick. Each is responsible to demanding taskmasters; the former to the board of directors of ASURE and the latter to 770 PSA members.

Recognise organisational limits

- i. Unions are democratic organisations. They have all the strengths and weaknesses of democratic organisations. They have an ability

to bind many people to collective decisions, but they cannot afford to become distanced from the wishes of their membership. Leaders can shape ideas and promote them, but hearts and minds have to be continually won over. Business has to recognise and be aware of the added constraints that democratic organisations like unions have to observe and the limits that this places on their authority.

- ii. Business can be more directive of how its managers behave. Managers may not support Partnership for Quality, but they are still required to operate within its constraints. That still requires business to devote energy to winning the hearts and minds of its managers.
- iii. The PSA confronts this challenge by periodically revisiting the issue of the partnership agreement with its own membership to ensure that it has continued support. It last did this in 2003 and, in 2005, was consulting with its membership on this in conjunction with the collective agreement negotiations. The ASURE CEO also has to ensure that he continues to have the support of his board.

Expect conflict

- i. Partnership is not without conflict. Even when there is a partnership agreement, business and unions have to prepare themselves for the emergence of conflict. They have to educate each other to the realities of conflict and how it will affect their behaviour, so that it does not come as a surprise that threatens the relationship.
- ii. Partnership does not get suspended when significant problems arise. It is not a "sunny day approach". It is more relevant than ever

when the skies are clouding over. The reality is that conflict would be much greater in its absence.

- iii. At ASURE, an innovative behaviour of running what amounts to virtual disputes using open and effective communication channels is a great way to have a robust contest of ideas and positions, without having to resort to damaging behaviours.

Communication

- i. Communication and the commitment to its continual improvement is the oil lubricating the partnership relationship. This helps to reduce the level of disengagement because all participants within the organisations have access to knowledge, feel involved, and can contribute.
- ii. Effective communication involves broadening and deepening the understanding of the basis of partnership and its role in helping organisations to grow and meet challenges. At ASURE, the weekly bulletin and its structured feedback is already a positive initiative that could be further used as a vehicle for communicating partnership. Of particular importance is the need to focus on explaining the value of partnership to new staff who are PSA members.

Identify the benefits of partnership and market them internally

- i. The benefits a partnership can be obscured by the ongoing changes to the business. Focus needs to occur on making the benefits transparent even in the face of such change. Partnership does not necessarily work to prevent change. So union members, in

particular, need to understand its limits in this respect. Business also needs to understand that partnership is not about compliance.

- ii. A partnership can be a tool for better management of the workforce. ASURE has demonstrated that it enables the business to run with lower overheads and, at the same time, it requires and supports positive engagement with the workforce.
- iii. At ASURE, some of the negative comments interviewees made were the consequence of individuals feeling that partnership did not work to achieve the outcome they wanted. On an individual level, that is understandable; on an organisational level, a business or a union needs to look at the evidence of the outcomes of partnership and the value of these practical gains against the alternatives. For both ASURE and the PSA, these practical gains are extensive.

Partnership is a practical relationship

- i. Finally, partnership has a philosophical framework, but it is essentially strongest at that point where it is practical. On one level, the ASURE case study defined it as setting the rules of engagement. Therefore, it is important to have structures and support systems in place to manage the relationship and ensure appropriate points of engagement.
- ii. ASURE and the PSA emphasise that partnership needs to be linked back to and form part of a collective agreement, because this is the operational document which facilitates getting things done on a day-to-day basis for most workers and managers.
- iii. Partnership also requires facilitating the involvement of union members in decision-making to ensure a shared ownership of

plans, issues and problems. Partnership agreements should, ideally, consider the level of involvement the parties will have on the range of issues open to them and, from the union perspective, how members will be involved. Options for involvement could include a range of possibilities, such as requirements to be proactive in ensuring each other is in receipt of relevant information, consultation, and/or agreement.

Concluding comments

Partnership is a relationship and, therefore, it is not static. Parties are capable of having different perspectives that are equally valid because people's experiences are different. An employer and a union in a partnership relationship have to continually work at it and redefine it to suit the circumstances in which they operate.

The strength of partnership will ebb and flow depending on the commitment of the parties. Partnership is underpinned by principles and supported by processes and, ultimately, it is a way of working that adds value.

At ASURE, the parties to the partnership relationship have never shied away from the underlying tensions that exist because of their acknowledged different interests. What makes the relationship strong is their emphasis upon finding common ground to enable them to work together to achieve mutual gains.

The parties recognise that they will not always agree, but they respect each other's right to strongly advocate their individual interests. They do not resile from difficult issues; nor do they allow them to overwhelm the relationship. Importantly, the parties understand that the relationship, whilst framed by processes and systems, is cemented by personal behaviour and respect and trust between individuals.

This study highlighted some significant challenges facing the business of ASURE. The conclusion that can be drawn from all the individuals who participated in this study is that partnership provides this business with a solid platform and the best possible opportunity to meet these challenges to achieve positive outcomes and benefits for both ASURE and the PSA.

Appendix 1: Template for Interviews

Questions and issues canvassed

1. Why have a Partnership Protocol Agreement?
 - i. What was the context for implementing the Partnership Protocol?
 - ii. What were the factors that influenced this and were they positive or negative?
2. What does partnership mean at ASURE?
 - i. Describe the relationship at a strategic level.
 - ii. Describe specific examples of how the relationship works at a site level on a day-to-day basis.
 - iii. Is partnership a living document?
 - iv. How is PSA/ASURE conflict resolved in a partnership framework?
3. What has been involved in the implementation of the Partnership Protocol Agreement?
 - i. What were the factors that have assisted the successful implementation of the Partnership Protocol Agreement?
 - ii. What systems and processes support the relationship?
 - iii. How is partnership promoted to existing and new staff?
 - iv. What are the behaviours required to support partnership and develop a positive relationship between the PSA and ASURE?
 - v. What are the resources that are required to keep Partnership running?
- vi. How is the partnership relationship funded and is this adequate? What is the practical support for the PSA?
- vii. What time commitments are required by staff involved and engaged with partnership?
- viii. Describe how senior management support for partnership is demonstrated?
- ix. What have been the barriers to successful partnership implementation?
- x. What are the skills that delegates/ members/managers need to participate in a partnership?
4. What are the challenges and issues going forward for the parties in the evolution of their partnership relationship?

Questions/issues for the union

- i. Do the PSA delegates feel that their skills are valued within the organisation?
- ii. Is there the potential for role confusion amongst PSA delegates?
- iii. How does the PSA deal with staff expectations for CA outcomes particularly where expectations are not met?

Questions/issues for the employer

- i. How is the Partnership Protocol Agreement reflected in your annual business planning documents?
- ii. How do senior management acknowledge/provide recognition of the skills and input of the PSA?

5. What are the outcomes of a Partnership Protocol Agreement?
 - i. To what extent can changes at ASURE be attributed to the Partnership Protocol Agreement and the relationship between ASURE with the PSA?
 - ii. What is working well and why?
 - iii. What is not working so well and why?
 - iv. How has partnership contributed to the PSA and ASURE's respective goals?
 - v. What are the tangible benefits to your organisation and staff/members operating in accordance with the Partnership Protocol Agreement principles?
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Appendix 2: Acknowledgements and List of Interviewees

Written material referred to or used in the development of this case study

PSA/ASURE Partnership Protocol Agreement

ASURE New Zealand/New Zealand PSA Communications Protocol Agreement, August 2000

The ASURE New Zealand/New Zealand PSA Collective Agreement

Partnership for Quality Review Research Report, March 2003. Prepared for the State Services Commission and the Public Service Association by NFO World Group

Briefs of evidence of Terry Pierson and John Guthrie from the Employment Relations Authority case between ASURE and NUPE

List of interviewees

ASURE:

Terry Pierson, Chief Executive Officer

National Operations Manager

Human Resources Manager

Corporate Account Manager

Area Manager

Supervisors

PSA:

Keith Gutsell, President

Ian Baldick, ASURE National organiser

PSA Delegates

PSA Members

Organiser

Appendix 3: Glossary of Terms/Acronyms

ASURE	ASURE New Zealand	PfQ	Partnership for Quality
CA	Collective Agreement	PfQD	Partnership for Quality Dividend
CEC	Collective Employment Contract	PRC	Partnership Resource Centre
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation	PSA	Public Service Association
MAF VA	The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry Verification Agency	SOE	State Owned Enterprise
NZFSA	The New Zealand Food Safety Authority	WHO	World Health Organisation

Appendix 4: ASURE New Zealand/New Zealand PSA Partnership Protocol Agreement, September 1999

Parties to Protocol Agreement

The parties to this protocol are ASURE New Zealand Limited (ASURE) and the New Zealand Public Service Association (PSA).

Introduction

The purpose of this protocol is to formally establish a framework for a relationship between the parties within which each can work to enhance their long term interests. This protocol formalises the commitment of the parties to establish a new kind of industrial relationship in which the old “them and us” is replaced with a different approach which recognises that what is primary is the common interest of the parties.

This is not to expect that the parties will always agree over everything and this protocol does not compromise any rights of the parties under the law.

However the parties wish to record formally in this protocol their joint determination to find a way of working together which will improve the quality and efficiency of the provision of ASURE New Zealand’s service and its financial viability. The parties acknowledge that traditional industrial relations practices do not support ASURE New Zealand’s drive to improve the quality of its services.

The parties believe that ASURE New Zealand’s business viability and the quality of employment of employees can be enhanced by the PSA and ASURE New Zealand working together in partnership.

Common statement

ASURE New Zealand believes its employees are important stakeholders in its business. ASURE New Zealand therefore wishes to maintain a positive working relationship with the PSA. ASURE New Zealand recognises the PSA as an independent organisation which is the representative and leader of its members and as a partner in its business on the terms of this protocol.

The PSA recognises that it can adequately represent the best interests of its members in ASURE New Zealand only by contributing to the achievement of ASURE New Zealand’s strategic business plan in the context of this protocol and a positive working relationship with ASURE New Zealand’s management.

The parties recognise

The common interest that the parties have in an efficient and effective ASURE New Zealand which is acknowledged as a world leader in the provision of responsive, modern, cost effective services.

That the environment within which ASURE New Zealand operates is changing and as a result ASURE New Zealand must redesign its processes, introduce new business and upskill staff.

Communication

The parties recognise that this protocol embodies a new approach to union/management relations and may not be widely understood by either union members or line managers. The parties agree a plan is necessary to develop such an understanding and win support for the approach embodied in this protocol among staff and managers.

The PSA accepts that the ongoing implementation of this protocol exposes it to confidential information. It agrees to respect the confidentiality of this information.

The parties agree that they will issue media statements on matters sensitive to the other only after they have consulted with and considered the views of the other party. On occasions joint media statements may be made.

Commitments

The parties commit themselves to the following:

Business Focus – to improve the efficiency and effectiveness and financial viability of ASURE New Zealand through the implementation of the Simplified Business Framework.

Development of staff – to develop the skills and abilities of staff through personal development.

Quality jobs – to enhance the quality of work and jobs within ASURE New Zealand.

No surprises – to maintain open and regular communication on matters which affect interests of the parties.

Problem-solving – to promote the speedy resolution of problems by participative methods, thereby avoiding any industrial stoppages and minimising litigation.

Behaviour – to act in a way this is consistent with this protocol.

Workplace partnerships can help build quality relationships which lead to more effective and fulfilling workplaces and better business performance. The Partnership Resource Centre is responsible for fostering such partnerships. It works with employers and unions to develop co-operative workplaces which focus on working towards meeting agreed and mutually beneficial objectives.

The purpose of this occasional paper series is to provide case studies and other publications to promote best practice and share experience in partnership approaches.

The Centre's services also include:

- Providing information on partnership
- Supporting capability development for managers, union officials and delegates at different stages/ levels of partnership
- Developing, delivering, and disseminating specific resource and training materials, case studies, and other tools to support partnership approaches
- Providing opportunities for shared learning and networking for managers and unionists involved in partnership initiatives
- Providing expert facilitative support at more advanced stages of partnership development or where obstacles have been encountered
- Offering training in improving interpersonal and organisational processes, such as conflict resolution and business analysis
- Providing expertise in organisation development and change management.

