

THE BENEFITS OF CONSULTATION

INTRODUCTION

Consultation and problem solving have long been the foundation of labour-management relations in the Department of National Defence (DND). It is largely as a result of this approach that we have avoided the climate of mistrust and confrontation which can be so detrimental, not only to the working environment but to productivity as well. The following outlines the understanding reached between management and the unions with respect to consultation as well, it reflects the recent changes made to federal legislation regarding human resources modernization (Public Service Labour Relations Act, April 2005, and changes to the Financial Administration Act, April 2005).

WHAT IS CONSULTATION?

Consultation is a process of seeking and providing information and advice, exchanging views, and discussing problems in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. To be effective, the process must be motivated by a commitment of both sides to sharing information, to listening to the opinions and observations of the other, and to working together to solve problems and resolve differences. Consultation in a labour relations context can be defined as: full disclosure, to the maximum extent possible, of contemplated actions to the representatives of the other party, prior to decisions being taken, with a view to ascertaining the full implications of those actions on the legitimate interests of the other party and resolving any problems which are identified.

WHY CONSULT?

Consultation is useful, constructive exercise in promoting understanding and problem solving between management and unions. It does not diminish the authority of either party or restrict the ability or the obligation to make decisions and take required actions. Any exchange of views, which leads to a more informed decision, is productive for all parties. The end result will normally be better decisions which will also be better accepted by those whom they affect since they will feel part of these changes. This can only lead to savings of time and money, better morale, better co-operation, reduced conflict, and decreased human stress.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

To be effective, a policy of consultation and shared problem-solving must be a constant and integral element of the philosophy of all those charged with supervisory

and leadership responsibilities, whether they are civilian employees, members of the Canadian Forces or union representatives. All share the responsibility for adopting a consultative approach in all areas of their union management interactions. Each party must bring to the consultation process a willingness to listen to and respect the bona fide interests of the other and a determination to find mutually acceptable solutions to problems identified.

TIMING OF CONSULTATION

Consultation should take place, to the extent possible, prior to decisions being made on issues that affect the legitimate interests of the other party. To be most effective, consultation needs to occur as early as possible so that the results of that consultation can be incorporated in the ultimate decision. To put this in context, ideally, parties should consult on planned changes as soon as there is a reasonable likelihood that change will take place.

FORUMS FOR CONSULTATION

Labour-Management Relations Committees are the focal point for consultation. The guidelines, which follow, set out a framework for committees at the National, Intermediate (i.e. Areas, Operational Headquarters, and Formations) and Local levels. Recognizing that flexibility must be permitted to allow for regional uniqueness, and region specific issues, parties at all levels are not restricted to these formal mechanisms and are encouraged to be creative and innovative in their approaches to consultation.