

What Every Director Should Know About Industrial Relations



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Oakbridges Labour Relations Strategists
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Responsibilities of the Board

Every Board of Directors has a set of responsibilities to a variety of stakeholders to ensure the affairs of the organization are governed according to ethical and moral standards and to ensure the interests of the owners (and others) are being addressed. The responsibilities of Board members include not only overseeing good governance but to also provide leadership and guidance to the Executive Team. The stakeholder approach which has recently garnered the attention of Boards dictates that Directors turn their minds to wider societal issues such as sustainability and the impact the corporation's activities have on the community.

The new dominance of the stakeholder perspective is in part a response to the difficulties some Boards found themselves in when they placed shareholder interests and the interests of the Executive Team above the interests of other groups. At the same time there is growing activism amongst special interest groups to voice their concerns regarding the impact corporate activities can have on the environment and on the community. While these are reasons enough to pay attention to the wider group of stakeholders there is a more compelling motivation. By engaging all stakeholders an organization stands to create a shared value that will translate into better top and bottom line results.

As Labour Relations Practitioners we have found that matters involving the broader subject of industrial relations seldom meet the attention of the Directors except at times, typically around the expiry of a collective agreement, when there may be obvious material risks to the organization. Otherwise the importance of having sound long term industrial relations strategies as part of the overall business plan has not been fully embraced by many Boards. One of the reasons this is so is that labour relations practitioners tend to adopt a narrow view of what they are to be held responsible for. Again, the notion of creating shared value unlocks a significant

potential for the organization but requires Directors to consider how to broker many interests within a comprehensive and cohesive strategy.

Industrial Relations/Labour Relations/Employee Relations

While the different terms are often used synonymously, industrial relations, labour relations and employee relations each have different meanings. Industrial Relations involves the relationships between the organization and a wide set of stakeholders that includes its employees, the community, the general public, special interest groups and government agencies. Labour Relations is a subset of this concerned chiefly with employees and the unions that represent them or that might have an interest in representing them. Employee Relations is solely concentrated on the internal relationships with employees.

Our preference is to consider the wider industrial relations paradigm because it aligns with the stakeholder approach Boards have adopted. We use the term labour relations simply because it has become the common term used in Canada. Our perspective is on the wider notion of industrial relations which incorporates the interests of employees, unions and all other relevant stakeholders because being strategic requires one to adopt a view of the long term impact actions have on everyone the organization has an effect on.

More importantly by considering the full breadth of stakeholder interests there are strategies that can be developed that will unlock the inherent shared value that a silo approach overlooks. Under the industrial relations paradigm an organization can build comprehensive plans to ensure everyone is paying attention to long term issues and in particular the sustainability of the organization, its resources and the communities it operate in.

The stakeholder approach follows the theory of organizational management that addresses morals and values in managing an organization. We believe that it is much more. A stakeholder orientation unlocks a lot of potential from a variety of stakeholders that creates shared value - a value that can be measured in terms of

both top and bottom line improvements. In this short booklet we will explain what every Director needs to know about labour relations in order to optimize the strategic choices available to the organization and help it create a sustainable competitive advantage.

Boards are generally responsible to provide oversight in the following areas:

Governance relates to consistent management, cohesive policies, guidance, processes and decision-rights for a given area of responsibility. Often Boards overlook exercising any control or oversight with respect to labour relations because the decisions made in that space are not considered material. The exception seems to occur around collective bargaining time when the risks are significant enough to garner the attention of the Board. Otherwise only significant matters arising through the grievance-arbitration process which could have a material impact on the business (these are rare).

However the labour relations environment has a direct and very real impact on the performance of the organization. The quality of the direct relationship with employees will impact service delivery, product quality, productivity, operational flexibility and the overall competitive advantage of the organization. It is of strategic importance. Hence the advantages created by organizations such as Southwest Airlines, Walmart, and Disney. Certainly many organizations have in recent years seen the value in promoting their “employment brand” by participating in programs such as Canada’s 50 Best Employers.

In addition we have identified governance issues relating to consistency and cohesiveness between strategic initiatives involving different stakeholders. The IR labour relations strategy for example has to compliment the community development or aboriginal engagement strategies the organization may be contemplating as well as being in harmony with the overall approach to Human Resources Management.

Strategic Planning is an organization's process of defining its business plans or direction, and making decisions on allocating its resources to pursue this strategy. In order to determine the direction of the organization, it is necessary to understand its current position and the possible avenues through which it can pursue a particular course of action.

The labour relations strategy is a subset of the overall business plan but represents an important element in that the direct relationship between the organization and its employees is the chief enabler to ensuring the overall business plans are executed well. A comprehensive and integrated labour relations strategy will ensure the organization is optimizing the use of its people and thus will positively impact on service, product quality, productivity, operational flexibility and reputation in the marketplace.

Organizational and Executive Performance refers to the oversight of how well the business plans are being executed. The focus of Boards, is rightfully on the achievement of measurable targets with respect to cash flow, profitability, top line revenue growth and market capitalization. However, in reviewing organizational and Executive performance under a stakeholder paradigm dictates that the Board also provides oversight to the quality and nature of the organization's engagement with other stakeholders including employees, unions, the community and other special interest groups. Under a shared value approach there should be measurable activities that drive value for the organization and for others.

The concept of creating shared value naturally assumes a long term view and focuses on solutions that promote sustainability in the community and environs. Boards need to be courageous and understand the need to regain the trust of stakeholders in the community and amongst the general public. The IR/LR Strategy in combination with the overall approach to Human Resource Management and the implementation of the business plan provides the vehicle to think about long term impact and sustainability in a concrete and pragmatic way.

Risk Management and Mitigation requires the executive team to report to the Board any identifiable risks that could have a material impact on its performance or which could result in significant losses, including losses to the reputation of the organization.

The risks to an organization that is unionized can be significant. The obvious risk in a unionized environment is the risk of a significant work disruption every time the contract expires and negotiations take place. Losses during a strike include financial losses, loss of market share, lost opportunities and damage to the organization's reputation. These adverse impacts are not temporary; they have potential long term ramifications and can have a permanent impairment on the organization's ability to compete.

The risks associated with unionization go beyond those associated with collective bargaining. Once an organization enters into a relationship with a union it faces the potential for the erosion of management rights, the incursion of work rules (e.g. seniority provisions) that decrease operational flexibility, increased transaction costs, litigation/arbitration costs and adverse impact on productivity.

These effects are not inevitable. However, if they are not actively managed there is a distinct tendency for organizations to abdicate proactive employee relations approaches, slip into cultures of entitlement that go hand-in-hand with a sense of disengagement which can then characterize the entire "brand" of the organization. These effects need to be managed in order to counter the internal influences that shape the culture in any given direction.

Program and Policy Evaluation requires the Board to provide high level oversight to ensure the organization has established the appropriate programs and policies to manage the business in a consistent and predictable way. This has been identified as a key value driver and of utmost importance to the overall governance of the organization.

The objective of managing consistent programs and policies in the labour relations environment is to create a consistent organizational culture across the business. This ensures consistency in the way employees are treated, what employees can expect from the organization and what is expected of employees.

Financial Health - Every Board is ultimately responsible for ensuring the financial health of the organization is maintained and to ensure all the financial goals are achieved. In most organizations the cost of labour is a significant factor in determining financial results. In recent years, because of difficulties in financial markets, certain costs associated with labour (in particular pension and benefit costs) have become problematic and have threatened the viability of organizations that at one time were believed to be too big to fail. The financial crisis has served to demonstrate precisely how important a long term labour relations strategy can be to the very survival of an organization.

Given these responsibilities there are certain aspects of Labour Relations that Every Director Should Know:

- 1. What Unions do.**
- 2. Who the leaders of the Union are.**
- 3. How an organization creates a Labour Relations Strategy.**
- 4. The risks inherent in a collective bargaining relationship.**
- 5. The true costs of being unionized.**
- 6. How a collective agreement affects organizational policies.**
- 7. How a union's jurisdiction and scope of work are defined.**
- 8. The impact being unionized has on productivity.**
- 9. Why collaborative approaches don't seem to work between organizations and unions.**
- 10. How organizations can reduce the conflict and adversarial approaches inherent in collective bargaining**

1. What Do Unions Do?

Unions are independent organizations that represent the employees in an organization or people in an identifiable craft or trade. Industrial unions organize people in specific organizations. Originally industrial unions tended to focus on specific industrial sectors (automobile manufacturing, pulp and paper, steel). However, in order to grow they have branched out and virtually are willing to represent any group of employees in any industry. Notable private sector industrial unions include CAW, CEP, USW, and the Teamsters. Public sector unions follow the same “all employee” model but have tended to focus strictly in the public sector. However recently some public sector unions have organized employees with private sector employees (PSAC, CUPE/PWU).

Industrial unions in Canada operate in what is known as union shops, meaning that the employer can hire whoever it wants but the employees all must be represented by the union once they have passed probation.

Craft or trade unions strictly represent employees who share a common craft or certified skill. These unions are predominantly found in construction and collectively are sometimes referred to as the Building Trade Unions or BTU. Notable unions in this space include the Labourers (LIUNA), Carpenters, Ironworkers and Electricians (IBEW). These unions operate under a closed shop model meaning the employer must hire people who are already members of the union (through a hiring hall). There is significant flux in this area as industrial unions and others have been pressing to bring all-employee units into the construction sector in various Canadian jurisdictions.

Regardless of the model or sector unions exist to represent their members. They negotiate on their behalf during collective bargaining (i.e. represent their interests) and advocate for them in matters in dispute (i.e. represent their rights). Notwithstanding collective agreements are between unions and organizations (strictly speaking the employees are not a party) and therefore have independent interests and rights.

The primary function of a union is therefore to provide employees with a voice. They do this not only with the employer but also provide a voice for all their members through lobbying efforts with various governments and through advocating social causes in the media. The primary leverage unions have in exercising the collective voice is the ability of employees to withdraw their services legally (strike) to cause economic harm to the employer in order to exact concessions.

Unions are also organizations with their own agendas for growth. Unions grow by organizing workers in non-union companies, as well as following strategies to merge with others. The Communications, Energy and Paperworkers (CEP) union was founded through the merger of three former unions. The CEP is currently in talks to merge with the CAW to form a very large union that can leverage its size to engage in aggressive organizing campaigns.

Unions do not secure higher wages, or better benefits or job security for their members. These are things the employer grants through bargaining. Generally wages in unionized organizations are not higher than in comparable non-union organizations. However, in some circumstances bargaining can lead to the adoption of uncompetitive terms and conditions that drive costs up for the employer.

The main problem with unions is that the **impact on organizational culture** can drive up internal transaction costs and lead to an erosion of management rights. At an extreme this can lead to a culture of entitlement where productivity, service and product quality and operational flexibility can be compromised. This is an effect that can be countered successfully with the right labour relations strategy.

2. Who are the leaders of the Union?

Unions are large complex political organizations. The leaders are elected through democratic processes and in theory serve at the pleasure of the membership. In practice despite constitutions requiring periodic elections union leadership tends to remain very stable over time.

Union leaders at the top tend to be **very bright, politically astute and well-connected people**. They also have the advantage of having staff dedicated to ensuring they have the information they need to make effective decisions and to launch effective campaigns. Unions employ **organizers, economists, legal staff, researchers** and a host of other subject matter experts to help them manage union affairs. They are dedicated single purpose organizations.

It is critical to managing in a unionized environment to be aware of who the leaders are, what their agendas are (both with respect to the union's direction and their personal ambitions). Despite the relative stability of union leadership any union can make a dramatic change in direction with a change in the leadership. Buzz Hargrove of the CAW made several attempts to win over senior business leaders and to adopt a collaborative approach (though he certainly clung to his trade union beliefs). Buzz was very ambitious and had a significant media presence. His successor, Ken Lewenza, is far more aggressive in terms of organizing activities, engineering the merger with the CEP and being a bit less visible in the media.

A significant part of labour relations is building relationships. There is a distinct structure to every union but each has representatives at a local level (usually elected representatives from the employee population), at the staff level (typically called business agents or staff representatives) and at a national level. Over time the organization should build relations at all levels of the organization. The key is to build relationships based on respect.

3. How Does an Organization Create a Labour Relations Strategy?

To set the context for labour relations strategy we need to understand how it fits in the overall scheme of strategic human resource management (SHRM) which we might define as the proactive management of employees. Typically HR practitioners view specific functions as strategic activities associated with managing people resources. The strategic aspect of these activities lies in the alignment with the

business objectives. The activities themselves are not specifically strategic but rather are supporting or tactical actions.

We look at labour relations strategies (again think in the broader terms in the context of industrial relations) as being macro-level strategies where the attention has to shift to include how the organization interacts in the surrounding communities (**locally, regionally, nationally**) and other important **stakeholders**. The goal of the LR Strategy is to strike a balance between multiple stakeholders from both within and external to the organization. The ultimate objective is to create value for the organization (sustainable competitive advantage and operational flexibility); the employees (security and meaningful work); the community (sustainability and opportunities for inclusion/participation); shareholders (long-term superior returns and equity growth); unions (a strong voice and social justice); and specific affected interest groups (the aboriginal community).

When LR is focused simply on the needs of the union and the practitioner's relationship with employee representatives the function fails to leverage its expertise and the available network to create a wider culture based on shared values. We believe that when internal strategies evolve to assume a wider macro-perspective the value added increases exponentially.

Strategic Elements of a Labour Relations Strategy:

Foundational: It is important that the organization's vision, values and missions are reflected in the labour relations strategy. Ultimately the strategy is an enabler that assists the organization in realizing its vision, living its values and fulfilling its mission.

Business Strategies: Of primary importance is to ensure the labour relations strategy aligns with the business strategy. Within the documentation of the labour relations piece we like to see a reiteration of the business strategy so the assumptions made about what is important can be validated through the presentation of the LR strategy. It is also important to capture not only the financial and business goals but also to ensure the objective with respect to addressing the needs of all relevant stakeholders is considered.

Stakeholders include:

- Internal Stakeholders (Management and employees);
- Unions;
- Politicians and government agencies;
- Community leaders;
- Aboriginal Community;
- General Public/Media;
- Other Suppliers.

Related Strategies: Where strategies have been or will be developed to address specific stakeholders interests the labour relations strategy will need to address any overlaps or identify any potential barriers that might exist. For example, seniority provisions may be a barrier to certain inclusion goals. Organizations that have identified these types of barriers have developed Affirmative Action plans with the unions in order to provide so-called super-seniority rights for identifiable groups (e.g. aboriginals).

Current State: Simply stated in order to develop a strategy the best place to start is to do an analysis of the current state of labour relations. This is done through a series of interviews, examination of past bargaining notes, a review of grievances, arbitrations and awards and research into the union (e.g. leaders, campaigns, conventions, platforms). the key to this analysis is to find the key barriers to future successes (what does the organization have to focus on) and to identify the union's implicit or explicit strategies.

Desired Outcomes (what does Success Look like?): Simply put this is a description of the desired culture and the way success will be measured. This section contains the strategic objectives and an explanation of why each is important to the total outcome desired.

Detailed Strategy: In this section the details of execution are outlined along with any mitigating strategies and contingency plans.

Executive Summary: While in the report this will come first it is the last piece written.

The secret to Labour Relations Strategy is in the execution. Given the focus unions have on labour relations we believe organizations need to **turn to subject matter experts** who have the breadth and depth of experience and dedicated resources to match the horsepower unions bring to the table.

4. What Are the Risks Inherent in a Collective Bargaining Relationship?

The obvious risk is the risk of a work disruption associated with collective bargaining. Certainly strategically the organization will want to develop contingency plans to reduce these risks. The potential strategic options will depend on the organization's size (large multi-site organizations of course have more options than small single site organizations).

There are also risks associated with the administration, application and interpretation of the collective agreement. Disputes in the form of grievances that can be submitted to arbitration are virtually inevitable. Each grievance represents a potential liability and in a growingly complex labour arbitration regime the potential for material liabilities emerging (for example, from delays in litigating an employee termination) is increasing. Moreover, potential abuses of the grievance process can serve as a **significant distraction for the organization**, undermine supervisor confidence and authority and can be generally disruptive to organizational culture.

The risks associated with the **erosion of management rights** can be the result of definitive concessions to forgo certain rights (e.g. restrictions on contracting out) or through unconscious abdication of rights. It is important to understand precisely what is restricted by the collective agreement and what is

permissible either as a result of a deliberate agreement or as the result of the residual rights of management to manage. **The loss of management rights is often the least understood but the most significant in terms of risks to the business.** A loss of management rights can be manifest in terms of a loss in operational flexibility, losses in productivity, reduced production quality and lower employee morale.

In the absence of a deliberate approach or strategy to manage labour relations there is a risk, observed in far too many organizations, that a culture of entitlement will develop and will seriously impair the organization's competitive advantage.

Each one of these risks can be managed through the development of proactive strategies, plans for mitigation and a strong contingency plan.

5. What Are the True Costs of Being Unionized?

Unionization does not in itself automatically lead to increased costs. Studies have shown that unionized employees tend not to enjoy greater wages or benefits than employees in non-union organizations in the same sector (though unionized sectors do tend to be higher paying than sectors dominated by non-union organizations). The transaction cost theory in economics suggests that the real costs of doing business should be reduced by the existence of unions.

This is based on the notion that by providing predictable terms and conditions of work the organization's transactional costs are reduced precisely because it should be able to attract and retain better people. This simple notion however does not take into consideration other transaction costs associated with reduced management rights, restrictive work rules and the distractions caused by collective bargaining and grievances.

In fact, while wages and benefits tend to ultimately follow prevailing market trends the cost of collective bargaining, potential work stoppages, increased overheads (legal costs, labour relations' subject matter experts), and grievance litigation can be significant.

However, **the real cost is the impact on organizational effectiveness.** While there is no basis to suggest that unionized workers will be less productive than their non-union counterparts there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the presence of a union can cause decreases in productivity and overall organizational effectiveness. One of the most telling pieces of evidence occurs in an economic downturn when unionized organizations tend to be the first to be hit and the first to lay-off workers.

The upside is that these costs can be controlled through deliberate strategies and through an open transparent dialogue with the union.

6. How does a collective agreement affect organizational policies?

In a unionized environment technically management retains the right to develop, implement and enforce any rules or policies it deems appropriate. However, **the union can contest any rules or policies it deems are not consistent with the collective agreement.** The organization will then need to show that the policy is necessary to the interests of the business, are appropriate under the circumstances, are reasonable (and the least intrusive), are well communicated and finally that the consequences of breaching the policy are understood and equitably enforced.

Restrictions on contracting out can have a definite impact on community engagement plans. Seniority rules as mentioned above can seriously restrict affirmative action plans and disrupt individual development. In many, many instances unions will seek to restrict policies by insisting they be incorporated into the collective agreement.

In a significant arbitration case, *Weber v. Ontario Hydro*, [1995] 2 S.C.R. 929, the Supreme Court of Canada upheld the notion that in a unionized environment all matters related to the terms and conditions of employment of an individual emanated from the collective agreement. This removes the individual's rights to sue an employer for example. However, it also opens up the notion that anything that might affect the employment of the individual could be the subject of collective bargaining or alternatively be fair game for grievance arbitration.

The actual impact of *Weber* is very complex and there is room for employers to develop policies and rules outside the collective bargaining regime. However, **management certainly does not enjoy the latitude to act in its own interests** as it could in the absence of a union.

7. How is a Union's Jurisdiction and Scope of Work Defined?

Unions tend to apply for "all employee" units when they apply for certification. The parties then generally enter into discussions about what positions will be excluded (for example management, sales, administration, etc.). The basis that Labour Boards tend to prefer for determining the appropriateness of a bargaining unit are - larger more inclusive units over smaller fragmented units and the units should share a community of interest.

Once a bargaining unit has been certified the description is usually included in the recognition clause within the collective agreement. The **description typically remains static**. New jobs can be added to the bargaining unit as they are created and would only be kept out if the position matched the description of the excluded jobs.

This allows unions to continuously make claims over work, though their rights are to represent people not to own the work. **Jurisdiction can be one of the most contentious and difficult issues management faces.**

Unions will make claims over work and through various means seek to restrict who can perform the work. This can impact on contracting out strategies as well as creating a divide between those in the bargaining unit and those outside of it.

In fact the actual rules around jurisdiction are not as onerous as they may seem. However, through time past practices and concessions can increase a union's claim over work (rather than over people) and further restrict management rights.

8. What Impact Does Being Unionized Have on Productivity?

Union members are inherently no more or less productive than their non-union counterparts. However, restrictive work rules and a culture of entitlement can reduce productivity if not kept in check.

For example, it is generally accepted that management retains the right to determine the methods of work and to determine what an appropriate standard of production is. Notwithstanding, unions resist attempts to measure individual output and too often managers succumb to pressures to negotiate labour standards. Similarly, nothing in most collective agreements restricts the rights of management to assess individual performance or to conduct periodic performance reviews. Despite this very few unionized organizations have any formal process for measuring individual performance or providing feedback to employees. This despite that most Human Resources professionals would tell you that performance evaluations are critical to the overall performance of the organization.

In truth the drag on productivity that does exist in unionized environments is largely the product of management's reaction to the existence of the union and is **not inevitable**. Again a robust labour relations strategy can be developed to counteract these forces and drive productivity up.

9. Why Don't Collaborative Approaches Seem to Work Between Organizations and Unions?

In fact collaborative approaches do work. The problem is that some organizations attempt to change the nature of the relationship through initiatives like "mutual interest bargaining" and expect all aspects of the relationship to follow that paradigm. In fact the relationship will always be complex and will require multiple approaches including, and especially collaborative approaches. Regardless of the nature of the relationship there will be times when collaborating is right and other times when the parties need to compete (i.e. leverage their power), concede (i.e. let the other side win) and use coercion (i.e. threaten industrial action).

Certainly the goal is to establish a relationship built on **mutually accepted objectives, respect and trust**. Nevertheless, these objectives do not preclude the possibility that at times there will be a conflict between the interests of the parties that will require different approaches.

Seasoned practitioners know that you collaborate when there are overlapping interests and win-win solutions are the preferred option. We also know that conflict and differences of opinion do not have to result in dysfunctional outcomes. Rather **conflict can be a great source for creative solutions** and can be a vehicle for building a strong healthy relationship between two parties when they learn how to channel it towards finding solutions rather than defending positions.

10. How Can Organizations Reduce the Conflict and Adversarial Approaches Inherent in Collective Bargaining?

The simple answer is you cannot. There will always be matters where the parties will not agree. However, this is an area where unions bring a very positive attribute. With unions comes a structured approach to resolving workplace conflicts and disputes that cannot be readily replicated. Certainly alternative approaches to dispute resolution (ADR) have been effective in other forums. However, the grievance-arbitration process, mediation and labour management forums that have all developed in the labour relations regime continue to stand out as cost effective and expedient ways to deal with conflict. Like democracy, “it isn’t efficient but it’s better than the alternative”.

These areas still need attention but have substantial potential for channeling conflicts into positive results for all concerned.

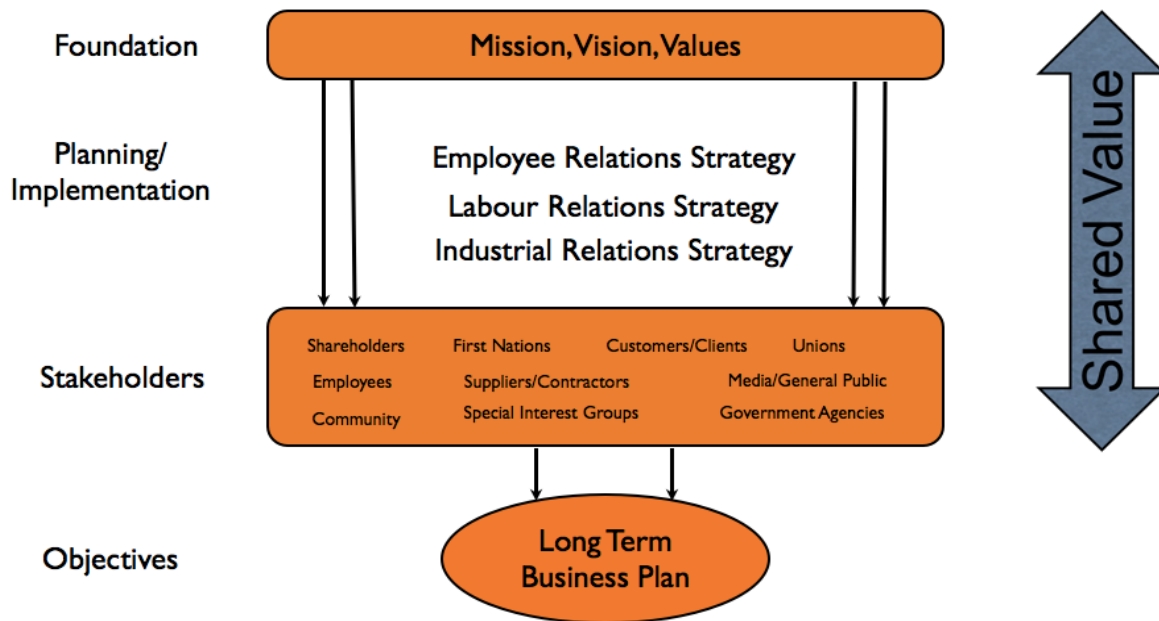
The Foundation of a Labour Relations Strategy

In order to define the intended culture of the organization senior executives articulate what is important through the development of Vision and Mission Statements. These statements describe what the collective aspirations of the organizations are and are meant to “inform” stakeholders what the behaviours and decision making ought to be in order to shape the organization’s culture and live up to its stated Mission and Vision. Unfortunately the experience of many labour relations practitioners is that they are often isolated from the broader business thinking and the strategies they develop are constrained as a result. Their objectives, either conceived or imposed, tend to be narrowly constrained to maintain labour peace and minimize the risks associated with collective bargaining. Seldom is the role of the labour relations practitioner seen as one of the critical architects of organizational culture. This is precisely the potential and the impact the role can have.

It is imperative that the Labour Relations Strategy be developed as an enabler to ensure the organization has the capability and capacity to realize its Vision and Mission. Perhaps even more importantly the practice of labour relations should reflect the core values of the organization and should go further to promote and embed those values into the culture.

Alternatively, when the practice of labour relations remains reactive the organization risks the emergence of an unintended internal counterculture that will impair its ability to create a differentiated culture. A positive aligned culture creates with it - competitive advantage.

A Framework for Labour Relations Strategy



What's the difference between Employee Relations, Labour Relations and Industrial Relations?

Employee Relations refers simply to the direct relationship between an organization and its employees.

Labour Relations refers to the direct relationship between the organization and its employees and the relationship between the organization and the union(s) that either represent the employees or who could potentially represent them.

Industrial Relations refers to the direct relationship between the organization and its employees and the relationship between the organization and the union(s) that either represent the employees or who could potentially represent them and the relationship between the organization and all other important stakeholders.

To be clear, in order for the practitioner to think more strategically she needs to develop an Industrial Relations Strategy. As the time horizons increase and as we evolve our strategic capabilities so does the sphere of stakeholders we will influence.

Why is this important?

The primary role of a Union is to provide a voice for employees. They do this by bargaining on behalf of employees to pursue and promote employee interests and by representing their members in dispute to protect the rights of employees.

However, **unions have wider goals** as well. Certainly they operate a not-for-profit enterprise that must develop a **growth strategy** to sustain its ability to provide a voice and to maintain organizational viability. Just as importantly unions tend towards **social activism** and thus introduce another dynamic with a voice for others including members of the community and in particular disadvantaged groups.

When an organization is focused on a narrow view of labour relations it effectively is allowing the unions to act on behalf of other groups (community, special interest groups etc.) that the organization should be engaging directly in order to live up to its values and to create shared value. Effectively a comprehensive industrial relations strategy looks to engage a wider group of stakeholders and providing them with an opportunity to speak with their own voices rather than through the filter of the union and its agenda.

Every Director needs to understand just how strategic having the right labour relations strategy is and how having the right approach can create competitive advantage. We hope we have shed a little light on this.

About Oakbridges Labour Relations Strategists Inc.

Our Strategists all have significant experience in the field of Labour-Management Relations. Our Labour Relations Strategists all have held senior management roles in organizations, acted as Chief Spokespeople in collective bargaining, and as Employer Advocates and in the administration, application and interpretation of employee relations policies and collective agreements.

Our name hopefully evokes the mental picture that **we bring strength to bridging the gap** that sometimes exists between management and front line employees and organizations and their wider industrial relations stakeholder groups. We are strategists. We focus on building long-term relationships and enduring relationships and creating shared value.

We have dealt with every major union in Canada and together have experience in every sector of the economy.

Our Services include:

- Developing and maintaining long term Industrial and Labour Relations strategies, shared value propositions with the Management Team and Union and other relevant stakeholders;
- Developing and maintaining union-free strategies;
- Collective Bargaining strategies and negotiations;
- Support medium and long term strategies by the design and implementation of Employee Relations programs in areas such as:
 - Positive Performance Management Processes;
 - Attendance Management Programs;
 - Direct day to day service delivery;
 - Employer advocacy (Grievances, Arbitration, Workplace Safety Insurance tribunals, Labour Boards);
 - Investigations (Code of Conduct issues, harassment allegations, Human Rights issues, Violence in the Workplace).

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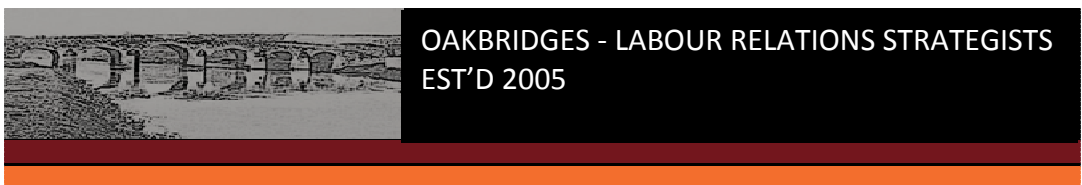
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