

Building a Cooperative and Collaborative Relationship

The need for dialogue and consultation has been stressed as an imperative to good governance. This is unquestionably and understandably so, given the fact such engagement remains critical to the communication process. Where there is room for consultation and dialogue to take place amongst the partners, it provides the scope for the venting of views, the promulgation of ideas and for meaningful discussion to take place. Using this platform, there is every good reason to believe that better understandings could be reached.

The fact that there is dialogue and consultation should not be taken to mean that there wouldn't be diverging views. The possibility exists that consensus of opinion could be reached, but in not in all circumstances should it be concluded that each partner is at ease with the final decision. It boils down in some instances to reaching a compromise. Having built a relationship where there is a commitment to dialogue and consultation, it is expected that the door remains open for any one of the parties to request a review of an agreed position. This is a healthy arrangement which argues well for paving the way for cooperation to take place.

The importance of cooperation to the outcomes in the process of consultation and dialogue is sometimes lost upon the parties. Dialogue and consultation is not seamless exercise, as it can be thwarted with a level of frustration and contention. This is where cooperation comes in, as it can go a long way towards diffusing the tension and frustration and bringing sound reasoning and judgements to bear. Inasmuch that cooperation is fundamental to reaching a common understanding; it requires that all the parties to the discussion come to the table open minded, without rigid positions and baggage. Where personalities, egos, narrow mindedness and self interest take prominence, chances are that cooperation is unlikely to be achieved.

Trade unions in supporting social dialogue, consultation and collaboration, do so with the clear understanding that is underpinned by the spirit of cooperation. There is also the awareness that this engagement is against the backdrop of

respect for the principle of autonomy. This invariably changes the behaviour of the actors, since it becomes evident that attitudes, dispositions and perceptions are the source of mistrust and a distraction from the achieving of an ultimate goal.

Collaboration and cooperation are important to establishing successful alliances. There is no ruling out the fact that in working towards establishing a level of cooperation that the process will not be without problems, expression of fears, suspicions and a semblance of hostility. These building of cooperative relations can have its moments as the parties attempt in earnest to override their differences. This must not always be easy to achieve, especially where there are fundamental philosophical, ideological, policy, political, cultural and structural organizational differences.