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MTR Crossrail & ASLEF:
Partnership in action

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IPA Case Study

Preface

I am delighted that the IPA has researched and published this case study of the close working relationship between ASLEF and MTR Crossrail, a partnership which is bringing to life the benefits of the new Elizabeth Line, one of the most important infrastructure projects in the UK.

It re-affirms my long held belief that mutual gains accrue to employers and employees if trade unions and managers establish relationships of trust, identify their common interests, and set up architecture to work through policies, practices, and to deal with the challenges and disagreements that will inevitably arise.

I am sure this model working approach – which finds an echo in many companies and employers across the UK – will underpin the successful operation of the Elizabeth line in the years ahead, and will serve as an exemplar to other organisations and trade unions seeking to work together as our economy and society faces up to the challenges of the coming years.

Preface by
Lord Monks of Blackley, President of the IPA

General Secretary of the TUC 1993-2003, General Secretary of the ETUC 2007-2011

Introduction

The IPA was delighted to have been asked by ASLEF and MTR Crossrail to undertake a case study of the partnership working relations established by company and union to underpin the success of London's new Elizabeth line.

As you will read in the following pages, the working relations developed and sustained over the last few years are an inspiring example of working together to achieve mutual gains and joint wins – of meeting challenges, of building joint relationships and an architecture for problem-solving, of demonstrating respect for each other's views and trusting each other's good intentions.

The relationship is also underpinned by a real commitment on the part of the company to engage union representatives and employees in the company's strategic decision-making, to ensure high performing and effective line management, to listen to employees and to ensuring trust by making sure that organisational values and behaviours on the ground match.

This is a wide-ranging partnership; the collective bargaining procedure which underpins the partnership relationship has involved working together in detail on recruitment, as well as pay and conditions, including rostering and timetabling. It has ensured that drivers were closely involved in the design of the cabs in the new rolling stock. And it has also ensured that key issues such as diversity and inclusion, family friendly policies, health, safety and wellbeing, training and development and career progression are addressed, to make the employee experience as positive as possible. Working together has ensured that unions and employees are aware of the strategic challenges the company faces, and are able to discuss these together and come up with joint solutions. It provides a means of identifying and managing change. As one manager interviewed put it: 'we trust our drivers with millions of pounds of equipment and people's lives – why shouldn't we trust them to improve our ways of working?' As an ASLEF representative pointed out, 'the relationship is symbiotic, when it's all hands to the pump.'

We know from our work in this field that partnership needs nurturing and sustaining. 'We're all part of the same industry. It's how we change the future together – both ASLEF and MTR have worked hard to improve and now it's a culture worth maintaining' as an ASLEF representative put it, in words echoed on the Company side: 'It's going well and we need to keep it that way – the relationship needs to be looked after.'

It needs ongoing commitment from the top, and to be deeply embedded operationally so the approach is shared down the line; it needs to be able to survive changes in personnel into the future. It also needs to be able to survive shocks and disappointments. Far from being an easy course, it demands a great deal of effort from union representatives and company managers.

Developing the appropriate behaviours has therefore been a key element in the success of joint working – with an explicit commitment from the company to treat the union as a business partner, sharing information and problems in a no-surprises culture, which is appreciated by both partners. As interviewees from both MTR Crossrail and ASLEF explain in their own words, honesty and transparency, with strong personal relationships based on communication and trust have been essential in developing and embedding this way of working.

As this study shows, the effort can pay off handsomely. For MTR Crossrail, it underpins the company's aspiration to be an employer of choice; for ASLEF it gives the union the key role in improving pay, conditions and prospects for employees. In my view MTR Crossrail and ASLEF are to be congratulated for demonstrating that positive industrial relations are both necessary and possible, and are to the mutual benefit of employer and employee alike.

Nita Clarke OBE

Director IPA

Co-chair national employee engagement taskforce

Background

ASLEF and MTR Crossrail have developed a strong working relationship since the latter secured the concession to run the new Elizabeth line for Transport for London in November 2014. This has enabled a series of agreements on terms and conditions for around 88 drivers TUPE transferred from the Greater Anglia TOC and for new recruits, culminating in a recently signed three year pay deal, ensuring agreement on issues such as timetables, rostering, leave and sick pay.

The company and the union have also worked closely together to ensure good recruitment practices, with a focus on diversity, to widen the profile of the train driver complement. The total driver workforce is expected to reach up to 450 by the time the line is fully operational in 2019, with around 12 new drivers a month currently going through training.

The union and drivers were also closely involved in the design of the cabs for the new trains which are being built by Bombardier, and the union also participates in the ongoing tests of the new trains which are taking place.

The new relationship builds on pre-existing positive union-management relations within Greater Anglia, and will enable the five phased stages of the Elizabeth line operation to proceed effectively and efficiently. As well as the importance of building personal relationships of trust which have developed between senior officials and MTR managers, there is also a union/company framework of meetings, which ensures that all depots are involved, with a drivers' functional council where company-wide issues are discussed.

The IPA was commissioned to undertake a study of how this positive working relationship between trade union and company – on a vital and high profile piece of transport infrastructure of national significance – was developed, how it is being sustained, and the mutual benefits that both parties believe it brings.

Methodology

The IPA conducted a series of focus groups to examine the ethos and culture that underpins successful joint working. These focus groups included a broad range of senior and line managers as well as senior and lay representatives from ASLEF and took place between September and November 2017.

The interview questions centred on the following:

- The factors that underpin the relationship
- Identifying the shared and separate interests
- How the relationship works in practice
- How the relationship works amongst the senior partners
- How relationships work on the shop floor and in-between
- How the partners manage and influence change
- How the mix of traditional approaches and new ways of working together help the partnership

About MTR Crossrail

The MTR Corporation was established in 1975 with a mission to construct and operate an urban metro system for Hong Kong. MTR now operates nine commuter railway lines, a Light Rail network and a high-speed Airport Express link that have an average weekday patronage of nearly 5.4 million passengers in Hong Kong.

From its starting base in Hong Kong, the Corporation has expanded into the Mainland of China. In Australia, it operates and manages Melbourne Metro and is a shareholder in the North West Rail Link project in Sydney. In Sweden, MTR operates the Stockholm Metro, intercity service between Stockholm and Gothenburg and Stockholm Commuter Rail Systems. MTR is regarded as one of the world's leading railway operators for safety, reliability, customer service and cost efficiency.

On 30th July 2014 MTR Corporation (Crossrail) Limited, a 100% owned subsidiary of MTR Corporation, was awarded the concession for operating the new Elizabeth line services across London. On 31st May 2015, MTR Crossrail commenced operation of services between Liverpool Street and Shenfield under the interim TfL Rail branding as part of the TfL network while work continues on the building of the new tunnels, stations, station improvements and trains along the Elizabeth line.

Next steps

It is planned that rail services will start between Heathrow and Paddington (mainline platforms) in May 2018, taking over from Heathrow Connect services. The central tunnel section will open at the end of the year, and Elizabeth line services between Paddington and Abbey Wood will commence.

By May 2019 the Elizabeth line will extend from Shenfield to Paddington and by the end of 2019 the line will be fully open, extending to Reading and Heathrow Terminal.

About ASLEF

The first recorded meeting of the 'Associated Society of Locomotive Steam Enginemen and Firemen' was held on 7 February 1880. Today, ASLEF is Britain's trade union for train drivers. Its more than 19,500 members are employed in the train operating companies, freight companies, London Underground and some Light Rapid Transport.

Each member belongs to one of 180 branches that are spread throughout the UK. Branches are then split into 8 districts which are headed up by a District Organiser. Each district also has its own Executive Committee member, District Council Secretary and Consultative Committee Representatives.

The overall control and direction of the union is delegated by the Annual Assembly of Delegates (ASLEF's annual conference) to its Executive Committee. The Executive Committee is elected by members within each district and it in turn elects its President from among its members.

Most members' contact with the union will be with their local representative (LDC). LDCs are predominantly depot-based and deal with current local issues for the group of members they work alongside.

Each company has a Company Council elected by union members as the next tier above local level reps to deal with company-specific issues. This means that the items passed at a branch meeting concerning a company are negotiated by ASLEF members employed by that company. The Company Councils are responsible directly to the people who put them in these positions, and for whom they work. They are where the union meets management to discuss, debate and hopefully agree on all conditions of service, including pay. The agreement between MTR Crossrail and ASLEF provides a procedural framework for collective bargaining and joint consultation in the interests of both parties in partnership.

Before they sign off agreements which fundamentally affect terms and conditions, however, they report the outcome of negotiations to the Executive Committee which acts as the voice of the entire, rather than sectional membership. This is to ensure that nothing is agreed outside national policy. **The ASLEF Charter** underpins the union's industrial strategy and serves as the symbol that drives ASLEF towards establishing conditions of employment that provide the benchmark for best practice within the railway industry.

Box 1: The ASLEF Charter, Annual Assembly of Delegates, 2016

Professional salaries that befit our members' status, with sickness and leave payments to be 100% of salary.

Pensions to be 100% of salary backdated to first implementation date of DRI and the total eradication of the integration factor, and total opposition to any further contribution holidays or eradication of final salary schemes.

Retirement at 55 with the first stage at 60 with no loss of pensionable benefits.

A safe working environment, with state of the art technology equipment for our members with a pro-active approach to occupational health and welfare for our members.

An average 32hr, 4 day week over the yearly roster cycle for all our members with special cognisance of shift patterns and fatigue. The maximum working day not to exceed 9 hours 30 minutes, or between 8 and 9 hours when working night turns of duty. There should also be protection for our members with a minimum turn length not to be lower than six hours of duty.

All free time off from duty to be rostered consecutively, to be guaranteed and mandatory by the elimination of institutionalised overtime.

Improved annual leave and special leave arrangements with major improvements to 'work life balance' so that our members only work to live, with a more pro-active approach to obtaining better maternity, paternity and parental including adoptive leave arrangements for all members and strong representational rights to time off and for educational purposes. ASLEF recognises the importance of providing alternative work life balance opportunities and encourages the implementation of 'Job Share' agreements being made available through collective means for our members, however these arrangements should not be used to facilitate or encourage working beyond state pension age.

Total job security and protection for medically restricted members, with all members having access to an insurance protection scheme. All members who are unable to continue in their role due to ill-health or medical restrictions to retain their full rate of pay regardless of any other lower paid grade or role they may be placed into as a result. The salaries of drivers who are removed from driving duties due to competence-related issues to be protected.

All members having protective arrangements for security of employment, with the opportunity to transfer or obtain promotion with the aid of a PT&R or equivalent and protection from compulsory redundancies, including a National arrangement which facilitates members facing redundancy being able to transfer to positions within other operators.

Enhanced training and skills initiatives for all our members to enable them to carry out their public service responsibilities safely.

Pro-active recruitment of persons of those groups e.g. women and ethnic minorities who are currently under-represented among our member grades in the industry.

All members irrespective of service to receive equal free travel facilities and improved free travel facilities which may be multi-modal. This to include residential and leisure concessionary travel as granted to active 'safeguarded' staff employed prior to 1st April 1996.

No extension of DOO schemes or introduction of DOO in the form of DCO or any other name. All current DOO(P) schemes to be revisited and safety risk assessed with a policy of all trains having a second person who is trained and licensed at least to the standard required to carry out the duties of guard as detailed in the industry rule book.

Short-term or fixed-term contracts are unacceptable employment arrangements. However, ASLEF will actively seek to negotiate with TOC/FOC's part time contracts but not to the detriment of establishment numbers.

What is Partnership?

In 1992, IPA published a consultative document – *Towards Industrial Partnership: New Ways of Working in British Companies*[1] - which set out seven principles of partnership. The findings of this report were highly influential in UK industrial relations, by setting out the case for, and practical steps to achieve, a positive partnership-based approach. This approach was further developed in the IPA's 1997 updated report and with the 2011 publication of Partnership Working: A practitioner's guide.[2]

We suggested three commitments to which all partners should subscribe:

- the success of the enterprise
- building trust through greater involvement
- respect for the legitimacy of other partners

And four building blocks on which a partnership is built:

- recognition of employees' desire for security and the company's need to maximise flexibility
- sharing success within the company
- informing and consulting employees about issues at workplace and company level
- effective representation of people's views within the organisation

These principles align very closely with the six pillars of partnership outlined by the TUC.

- joint commitment to the success of the organisation
- joint recognition of each other's legitimate interests
- joint commitment to employment security
- joint focus on the quality of working life
- joint commitment to operating in a transparent manner
- joint commitment to add value to the arrangement

The IPA points out that working in partnership gives trade union representatives the opportunity to widen their influence in the workplace, thereby better meeting the needs of their members. Thus trade unions are not restricted to negotiating over pay, terms and conditions, and health and safety, but become involved in and are consulted over any substantive change in the organisation, and have a legitimate role in influencing company strategy.

From the employers' perspective, working with the trades unions in partnership can help managers both at a strategic level and in their day to day people management, by improving decision-making, supporting change management, and creating a culture of involvement and participation that can improve performance and productivity.

As a prominent researcher in the field, Graham Dietz wrote, "The litmus test for all partnerships…..is the quality of the joint problem-solving process….giving significant influence to employees over organisational decision-making early in the process and in delivering regular, acceptable mutual gains for all parties".[3]

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[1] *Towards Industrial Partnership: New Ways of Working in British Companies*. (1992 updated 1997). IPA

[2] Luckhurst D. and Jameson H., *Partnership Working: a practitioner's guide*, (2004, updated 2011). IPA

[3] Dietz G., Cullen J., and Coad A., Can there be non-union forms of partnership?, *Employee Relations,* Vol 27, No. 3 (2005) pp289 - 306

The MTR Crossrail and ASLEF Partnership

The collective bargaining procedure which underpins the partnership relationship is founded upon a number of key principles. Importantly, both parties must contribute to the achievement of business objectives and support MTR Crossrail's efforts to instil in its people an emphasis on the customer, both internal and external and be aligned to the company's vision, mission and values (see box 2).

Both parties also agree that staff should be treated, first and foremost, as people with individual needs and expectations. MTR Crossrail's objective is to become known as a good employer that values its people for the contribution that they make to the wellbeing and future progress of its business. The collective procedures must, therefore, allow the development of practices which are in line with the value which the businesses place on their staff.

Importantly, ASLEF recognises MTR Crossrail's right to communicate directly with all of its staff on all matters of interest to them but the company is committed to communicating with ASLEF in advance of announcing any proposed changes.

The MTR Crossrail/ASLEF partnership recognises the legitimate interests of each party both in terms of where these coincide and the occasions where they may diverge. According to a senior MTR Crossrail manager and echoed by his senior ASLEF counterpart, "it is how we deal with the fall outs" which demonstrates the significant commitment to making the relationship work.

The partners accept that they have a joint responsibility to ensure that the acceptance of proposals is not unreasonably withheld and, once agreement on proposals has been reached, to take all reasonable steps to ensure their successful implementation. They further accept that differences and disputes will be dealt with by way of the appropriate agreed procedures.

MTR Crossrail acknowledge that ASLEF may have access to and be entrusted with confidential company information or information which is otherwise commercially sensitive. In turn, ASLEF agree that it and its representatives will always maintain that confidentiality.

If it becomes necessary, MTR Crossrail will explain the reasons for not sharing any confidential or commercially sensitive information and the reasons why information has been designated confidential or commercially sensitive.

Box 2, MTR Crossrail's vision, mission & values

Vision

To set a new transport standard for the UK, moving people and connecting communities better than anyone else

- Excellence in customer service through 41 Elizabeth line stations
- Providing approximately 700 timetabled services per day
- A peak timetable frequency of 24 trains per hour
- An estimated 200 million annual passengers will use the Elizabeth line
- Totaling an estimated 11.4 million train service km per year

By December 2019 the construction project will be complete, marking the introduction of full Elizabeth line services through London.

MTR Crossrail expects to employ up to 850 new people, creating jobs for local people. This will include almost 400 drivers and over 50 apprenticeships.

Mission

- Enhance our customers' experience, ensuring a safe, reliable and high quality journey
- Actively engage with communities to move London forward
- Foster a company culture whereby we inspire, empower and develop our people
- Build our business through innovation and continuous improvement

Values

- Excellent service
- Mutual respect
- Value creation
- Enterprising spirit

The business views the union as its "business partner" with a genuine understanding of MTR Crossrail's vision, and how to get there, which is seen as "transformational".

Clearly, the MTR Crossrail and ASLEF Partnership is built on the pillars of partnership identified by IPA and the TUC, but how does it work in practice? During interviews with senior managers and trade union officials, and in focus groups with line managers and employees, IPA explored how the partnership works *"at the coalface"* and how these high level partnership commitments are translated into day to day working.

Making it work – creating trust in an open and honest relationship

Honesty and transparency are essential to making any partnership work. According to one senior manager, *"honesty is a massive underpin"*. For a senior ASLEF representative, *"It's all about dialogue - sometimes we role reverse and put ourselves in each other's positions but we work together to solve problems"*.

Whilst it was acknowledged by managers participating in the focus groups that sometimes decisions that are made prove not to be the correct ones, it is a testament to the strength of the partnership that these issues can be acknowledged and, working in partnership with the union, steps can be taken to put matters right. As one manager explained *"The union allows us to prove our worth and this plays to our values of mutual respect"*.

Commitment from the most senior management level is seen as essential to maintaining this positive working relationship and ensuring that it is the model for line and operational managers.

Making it work - Involving the whole workforce

Part of the company's mission is to foster an inspiring and empowering company culture and to invest in skills and personal development, to achieve better business outcomes – innovation and continuous improvement.

Whilst having a workforce that is informed about the company's ambitions is important to achieving this, it is equally important that staff know and understand the type of relationship that exists between the two partners. As a senior MTR Crossrail manager explains: *"we want problems solved at earliest levels so we produced a joint video to set out what we expect from people - this video was important as it meant staff could see that we get on"*. This approach is seen as critical to the success of the business, as one MTR Crossrail line manager said: *"there is a joint acknowledgement that the industry works on discretionary effort, so we engage the union early as it helps us both to explain what's going on"*.

The video emphasises that there is an expectation that all employees will get involved, not just the union reps. As a senior ASLEF representative explains: *"ASLEF believe in the vision and is progressive because we support the business and we share the strategic narrative, but we have to remember that staff are informed – they will tell us if it's going to work or not - so we 'pick their brains' as soon as we can"*. Above all, *"the organisation knows that a happy workforce is a productive one"* so the emphasis on both sides is to avoid unnecessary conflict.

The video was the foundation for setting expectations from top to bottom. It sets out a clear strategy that is supported by the recognition agreement that partnership thinking, behaviours and actions should be, as one senior MTR Crossrail manager stated, *"simply the way we do things throughout the whole organisation"*.

Making it work - A culture of mutual respect

The principles contained in the video were brought to life through a comprehensive joint training programme. The senior managers and senior ASLEF representatives are highly respected amongst their peers, respect each other and understand that they both need to meet the high expectations that have developed amongst the staff as a result of the progressive relationship. The training was seen as a significant step to ensuring that this joint understanding filtered through to all levels of the organisation. Both partners realise that the partnership needs to evolve and contribute to continuous improvement in the business, as one senior MTR Crossrail manager put it *"we can do better in future rather than trundle on"*. To achieve this, the partnership relationship has to be seen to benefit the staff, according to a senior ASLEF representative, *"we encourage them to grow – we both want a highly engaged workforce"*.

This approach is driven from the top, as a local ASLEF representative stated; *"the ASLEF General Secretary is on the button – he sets the union's strategic narrative and the message does filter down as we're all solution focussed"*. Equally, as an MTR Crossrail line manager stated *"the managing director supports the positive relationship – it all stems from his belief that we should work with people so he'll challenge managers if this doesn't happen"*. An MTR Crossrail line manager also expressed confidence that there is a *"genuine, clear direction of where we want to go and how to get there – it's transformational in the truest sense, challenge can be valuable - we find out things from ASLEF"*. As a result, although disagreements may happen, all parties have confidence that they can be resolved.

The Challenges

Partnership working at all levels

After the training was completed, one of the key challenges identified was how to extend the practice of working together to solve problems throughout the organisation at all levels, and not just at senior roles. As one senior MTR Crossrail manager explained, this is done by example; *"we don't indulge in 'tea and toilets' [discussions] but everyone's voice is heard because we develop relationships – the relationships at the shop floor are important - these people will move up the ladder - and setting expectations is the key"*. For ASLEF, as stated by a local representative, *"scrutinisation (of decision making) makes us answer the questions that inform the staff and in turn that helps engagement ….local issues get resolved and do not escalate."*

If partnership is to extend to all levels of the organisation, then first tier and middle managers must be engaged and involved. Managers play an important role in connecting high level partnership rhetoric to every day working practices, and are therefore crucial in making the partnership meaningful to employees. As an MTR Crossrail line manager explains: *"managers echo ASLEF's views when it helps in developing staff"* and these operational relationships are developed positively because, according to a local ASLEF representative, *"we're honest – there's no point in tripping people up so we develop understanding"*. Importantly, as the MTR Crossrail line manager continued, *"each side have to trust each other to deliver – and it's all about understanding the bigger picture because that's the platform for pragmatism"*.

The ASLEF representatives can, according to one local official, *"act as a help and point of information particularly with newer staff"*. The line managers also play this key role, according to the same official: *"staff **do** go to managers because they are very good. Many of them are former drivers and ASLEF members, and know what they are doing"*.

Also important to the success of the partnership is bringing the workforce closer to the decisions made at the top levels of the company and the union. As a local ASLEF official explained, *"the ASLEF membership are highly engaged with the union corporate. Management has a board with broad ideas and ASLEF have an Executive with similarly broad ideas"*. Because of this, *"when we have opposing views, it cannot ever be personal and we have to respect the over-reaching agreements"*.

This approach is one of the strengths of the MTR Crossrail/ASLEF partnership and is instrumental to the strategic relationship. As one MTR Crossrail line manager goes on to explain; *"Both the organisation and the trade union trust managers and drivers to implement things"*.

Health, Safety and Wellbeing

Good and robust policies and procedures exist and these underpin the joint problem-solving nature of the relationship at operational levels. The partners agree that they both need to be vigilant when it comes to the drivers, as one ASLEF official stated; *"the key is when a driver thinks the job is easy, that's when things go wrong – but we take responsibility to relay info – this is right, this is wrong – this goes on a lot, experience is the best teacher but experienced people do help – we will intervene"*.

There are a number of specific challenges faced by the partners and it is recognised that drivers can be put at risk by errors or not properly following procedures. As one ASLEF representative says, *"it helps that managers are former drivers"*.

In order to make continuous improvements, staff are encouraged and supported by the partners to be honest about mistakes so that the individual and organisation can learn from them. There is a culture of learning from mistakes where, as one MTR Crossrail line manager stated, *"managers take their duty of care responsibly – they know because they've done the job"*.

Both managers and ASLEF representatives take their responsibilities to enhance driver wellbeing seriously. This includes providing advice, guidance and support to drivers on healthy lifestyle choices, being vigilant and being prepared to intervene if it is perceived there is the potential for errors to occur.

Communication

Effective communication can sometimes be a challenge. As a senior ASLEF official explained: *"sometimes communications don't happen as quickly as people like because we take time to think things through and avoid knee jerk reactions"*. A senior MTR Crossrail manager added that, *"it is important to employees that the ASLEF representatives are visible and seen to be active." The ASLEF representatives make people feel that they are "in a safe pair of hands"*.

Managers adopt a pragmatic approach. As one senior MTR Crossrail managers stated; *"we have regular meetings – we have a policy of no surprises – ASLEF representatives tell us things but so do the drivers – they don't feel they have to go via ASLEF but we will always involve them"*.

Effective partnership behaviours

In Partnership Working: A practitioner's guide, the IPA identified a checklist for partnership behaviours:

- Mutual respect
- Actively listening to each other
- Working from shared values
- Mutual understanding
- Being honest and open with each other
- Being solution focused
- Being inclusive
- Open communication and information sharing

Managers, ASLEF representatives and staff all have a responsibility to behave in ways that support partnership working throughout MTR Crossrail. All managers, for example, should provide clear expectations of conduct and examples of where conduct would be perceived to fall short of these expectations. ASLEF representatives, in turn, should provide representation in a responsible and professional manner assisting the process in a timely way to bring the proceedings to a speedy conclusion. Underpinning this is a clear responsibility that all staff should ask for information concerning the expected standard of conduct where they feel these are unclear.

This commitment to high behavioural standards for everybody has been key to establishing the strong relationship as summed up by one ASLEF representative, *"We all **want** to be here - it's not just about technical competency, it's also about the key behaviours that are expected"*.

An organisation can have any number of partnership principles and practices in place, but unless the partners' behaviours are compatible with them, individual relationships will break down and the partnership will be weakened. The relationship between MTR Crossrail and ASLEF is unusually robust where this is concerned.

Trust is at the heart of their partnership working and, therefore, the behaviour of all those involved helps to build and sustain the trust of the other party. Partnership behaviours are about respect and dignity and a desire to try and solve problems however difficult they may seem.

Working in partnership has meant that managers have adapted their decision-making process to ensure that the union is engaged in consultation over proposals at an early stage, and that other options brought forward by the union are properly considered before a final decision is made. The strength of the partnership is demonstrated by the fact that managers are not afraid to change their minds if they hear a better way of achieving a business objective.

Likewise, the ASLEF representatives are not be afraid to change track during the course of a meeting and are conscious that partnership is not about power and weakness – it is about reaching the best solution to a problem.

As a senior MTR Crossrail manager explains, *"there is an expectation on managers to find a solution to any issues that arise with ASLEF"*. Furthermore, *"whilst managers don't always get things right, the union will not use this as 'ammunition' in future"*.

Exhibiting the right behaviours is important. According to one MTR Crossrail line manager, *"we have to have the people skills to work effectively with the trade union"* and there is an expectation from the wider workforce that this will happen. This role is made easier for line managers because as another MTR Crossrail line manager states, *"if ASLEF bring something to us, we know it's a real issue because they've considered it"*.

Managers are open and pragmatic and, as one MTR Crossrail line manager stated, *"can be persuaded by a good case"*. When managers have to reject a case put by the union this does not lead to a break down in the partnership relationship because, according to a local ASLEF official *"its foundation is so strong and built on trust"*.

Sustainability and change management

Good behaviours are central to the partnership ethos. To ensure this culture is maintained, a senior MTR Crossrail manager explains that *"we set high standards of ourselves and we want to attract the best people – this is where our strong team ethics help us – the business' aspirations are getting out there and people want to come here. We need to know we're bringing the right people in – we don't just want numbers we want the quality"*.

Accordingly, ASLEF *"are a solution not a problem – we encourage people to join and give representatives release"*. One MTR Crossrail line manager summed up a general feeling that they *"enjoy working this way – and it was made clear at our interviews that we were expected to work this way"*. The same MTR Crossrail line managers also stated that *"some of those with longer service have seen the relationship drive the*

business forward since we changed our management style".

Managers see the important role the union plays in introducing innovation and change, as one MTR Crossrail line manager said; *"it makes change easier as the trade union creates the conduit"*. However, managers acknowledge that there is, as one MTR Crossrail line manager added, an expectation from the union that they will *"do the right thing" and that the union will challenge and "question why not?"*

Whilst training for TU representatives is optional, those who undertake training show commitment and some achieve Diploma level. According to the representatives themselves, the training makes *"a huge difference"* and embeds the principals of working in partnership.

Innovation

Working in partnership can enable successful change management and support higher levels of employee engagement. In order to do so, partnership must involve the wider workforce. As described by a senior MTR Crossrail manager, *"people need to feel part of something ….relations between departments are more effective and collaborative – it's all about constant communication and people are always talking – we need to maintain this as we grow – we need to avoid the "ivory tower" and building relationships on email"*.

The senior MTR Crossrail manager continued, *"staff are very involved – ASLEF is often a catalyst but the workforce are highly informed; managers respect that fact and that people know what they are talking about"*. Another MTR Crossrail senior manager agreed, saying that the partnership has created a culture where *"we get good responses to requests for ideas – genuine ways of improving things – some quite impactful like moving staff temporarily"*. Importantly, the same MTR Crossrail senior manager concluded that *"staff are highly effective in making changes at operational level – we give them scope within what's feasible"*. This strategy makes sense down the management line as described by one MTR Crossrail line manager, *"we trust our drivers with millions of pounds worth of equipment and peoples' lives – why shouldn't we trust them to improve our ways of working?"* A senior MTR Crossrail manager explains this pragmatic approach, *"we involve [the union] at the outset so we don't have to do everything again"*.

According to a senior ASLEF official this way of working allows the union to be *"more pro-active in helping people develop their careers – "It's part of our job – we look at Life Long Learning because we have to engage employees in a different way"*. For one MTR Crossrail line manager this is particularly important because *"our Key Performance Indicator structure is changing as we are being paid for performance – for example; are the trains clean, are they wearing their uniform? ASLEF has a vested interest in staff being engaged"*.

This mature and pragmatic approach allows staff to innovate. As an MTR Crossrail line manager stated, *"there are various examples of where ASLEF have come up with ideas"* and this permeates to all levels where *"everyone understands the positions we each have to take sometimes"*. Moreover, as a local ASLEF representative stated, *"the relationship is symbiotic when it's all hands to the pump"*.

The partners have worked together on a number of projects including testing the lighting at stations, signalling, monitoring the quality of CCTV and issues around health and safety. In addition to this, the partners take responsibility to identify where managers would benefit from training, which has helped to develop *"managers who are true role models in industrial relations and who deal with their staff well"*, according to a senior ASLEF official. As a result, the ASLEF reps are confident that their relationship with managers can be open and based on trust.

According to one ASLEF representative, MTR Crossrail are *"good to work with and we have the opportunity to get involved with projects and [the company] will usually act on our observations"*. This representative continued this theme, saying *"at all levels it is about the relationships because trust builds up over a period of time, this [can only be achieved] by telling it like it is"*.

The Future

Partnership is often based on a leap of faith and the managers are appreciative of the fact that ASLEF did just that. As one senior MTR Crossrail manager stated, *"we think they took a leap of faith and allowed us to prove our worth - now they are our business partner"*.

The core of the relationship is based on early involvement for ASLEF by MTR Crossrail managers who trust them both in terms of their reaction and confidentiality. The ASLEF representatives, *"know what we want to achieve and are not shy in giving opinions and are bought-in at an early stage and will cascade information responsibly"*.

The future of the partnership is based on solid foundations with a joint view that *"it's going well and we need to keep it that way - the relationship needs to be looked after"*.

For ASLEF, according to one of its senior representatives, this means they will continue to be *"as pragmatic as the managers – we need to give and take."* For the managers, the partnership will be sustained by ensuring that issues will continue to be addressed with the union at the earliest opportunity rather than escalated to higher levels.

The partners are in full agreement that *"we're all part of the same industry, it's how we change the future together – both ASLEF and MTR Crossrail have worked hard to improve and now it's a culture worth maintaining"*. This statement by a senior ASLEF representative was unanimously echoed by the MTR Crossrail senior managers.

This partnership, however, goes further than many similar arrangements. While it is unique in its industry, it is also unusual because it is so focused on employee engagement.

In 2009, David MacLeod and Nita Clarke co-authored and published Engaging for Success (also known as the MacLeod Review of Employee Engagement). This report has become the cornerstone of thinking on engagement and identified four key enablers of employee engagement:

- Visible, empowering leadership providing a strong strategic narrative about the organisation, where it's come from and where it's going.
- Engaging managers who focus on their people and give them scope, treat them as individuals and coach and stretch them.
- There is an informed employee voice throughout the organisation, for reinforcing and challenging views, between functions and externally. Employees are seen as central to the solution.
- There is organisational integrity – the values on the wall are reflected in day to day behaviours.

This MTR Crossrail and ASLEF partnership journey has followed these four enablers. The jointly produced video outlines the strategic narrative and this is supported by the training which produces both engaging managers and ASLEF representatives.

Both have contributed to a strong informed employee voice underpinned by an established set of behaviours outlined in the recognition agreement. The lack of complacency in this relationship will be a key factor in ensuring its long-term sustainability and provide a robust foundation to tackle the many challenges ahead.

The views expressed in this case study are those of the participants and not of the IPA.

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