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**Conférencier:**

**Conférenciers invités:** Mario Roy, Denis Harrison, Victor Y III Haines

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**Description:**

Labour-management cooperation involves a major shift from traditional adversarial labour relations to partnerships that build upon the common interests of both parties. Within this more cooperative labour relations framework, union representatives are more fully involved in core business decisions (e.g., strategy formulation, new investments, technological updates, training investments, outsourcing provisions, etc.) as well as in daily operational decisions, often through more participative work designs such as self-managed work teams, for example. The adoption of labour-management cooperation should then involve a profound change in the way union leaders perform their role. It would appear that the change requires that they balance their traditional role, which consists of defending the rights of workers, with their new role, which consists of participating in decision-making for the benefit of the organization (Rubinstein, 2001a).

Although numerous studies have investigated different aspects of labour-management cooperation (Gray, Myers, & Myers, 1999), how such arrangements impact union representatives remains largely unexplored (Rubinstein, 2001b). The aim of this paper is therefore to explore, on the basis of qualitative data, how the transition from adversarial to cooperative labour relations impacts positively or negatively the roles of union representatives. Initial data for this study were obtained from a one-day workshop of 20 managers and union representatives involved in recent and well established labour-management partnerships. This provided initial data and a framework for the development of an effective interview template for in-depth semi-structured interviews with management and union leaders. Those interviews were conducted in different locations with past and present union leaders and members sharing their positive and negative views of labour-management partnerships. The interviews were also conducted with managers whose relationships were affected by the partnership.

Analysis of the interviews shows an enlargement of the role of union leaders following the transition from adversarial to cooperative labour-management relations. Their role was enriched as they engaged in more positive discussions and acquired new competencies in the process. Union leaders must, however, deal with increasing pressures from both the union members they are accountable to and managers who developed new expectations regarding their involvement in decision-making. Some union members consider that their interests are not fully supported as a result of the cooperative approach. Managers, in turn, express dissatisfaction regarding the level of accountability of union leaders for mutually agreed upon decisions. This apparent role-conflict, however, was not strongly felt by union leaders themselves. Ironically, the role-conflict union leaders were hypothesized to experience was witnessed by union members and managers more than by the union leaders. Taken together, the results of this study suggest that a complex array of conditions is necessary to ensure the long term survival of labour-management cooperation, a seemingly fragile workplace innovation (Roche, 2000).