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Abstract

In 1993, then-President Clinton issued a landmark executive order mandating labor-management partnerships in the federal service. The authors examine a unique set of data on the operations and effects of 60 partnerships that covered several hundred thousand federal employees. These data, plus evidence on the broader federal sector, show that partnerships provided a forum for collaborative communications and joint decision-making, improved the labor relations climate, reduced labor-management disputes, and modestly improved organizational performance. Analyses of survey results from partnership- council representatives show that perceptions of communications and decision-making were positively correlated with labor relations climate and organizational performance. The authors discuss the implications of their results for labor-management cooperation generally and labor relations in the federal sector specifically.

KEYWORDS: partnerships, federal sector,

WHAT DID PARTNERSHIPS DO? EVIDENCE FROM THE FEDERAL SECTOR

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In 1993, then-President Clinton issued a landmark executive order mandating labor-management partnerships in the federal service. The authors examine a unique set of data on the operations and effects of 60 partnerships that covered several hundred thousand federal employees. These data, plus evidence on the broader federal sector, show that partnerships provided a forum for collaborative communications and joint decision-making, improved the labor relations climate, reduced labor-management disputes, and modestly improved organizational performance. Analyses of survey results from partnership-council representatives show that perceptions of communications and decision-making were positively correlated with labor relations climate and organizational performance. The authors discuss the implications of their results for labor-management cooperation generally and labor relations in the federal sector specifically.

Industrial relations (IR) researchers and practitioners have devoted considerable attention to labor-management cooperation as a strategy to improve workplace and organizational outcomes. Cooperative arrangements have emerged in numerous firms, prominently among industries fac-

ing intense global competition. Recently, however, cooperation has spread to the public sector, where operations are more labor-intensive and union density is higher. Government at all levels has faced the paradoxical challenge of improving services while reducing costs. In this context, labor-management cooperation has emerged as a performance-enhancement and cost-reduction strategy.

In the 1990s, the federal government undertook a major effort to institutionalize labor-management cooperation in its civilian work force, where approximately 60%

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As noted in the study, confidentiality agreements preclude direct or indirect identification of agency participants. However, the authors will make masked survey results available upon request for replication of data analyses. Contact the first author at 328 Mervis, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA 15260; e-mail: Marick@katz.pitt.edu.

of the employees belong to bargaining units. On October 1, 1993, then-President Clinton issued Executive Order 12871, mandating that federal agencies and departments must establish formal labor-management partnerships to "reinvent government." The order superimposed a strategic partnering arrangement onto a statutorily restrictive labor-management system that had grown dysfunctionally adversarial and legalistic. President Clinton sought to transform conflict into cooperation to create high-performance work organizations that cost less to run.

Little is known about how partnerships performed under the Clinton executive order (for preliminary assessments, see Ban 1995; Verma and Cutcher-Gershenfeld 1996; Doeringer, Kaboolian, Watkins, and Watson 1996; and Suntrup and Barnum 1997). We address this gap in the IR literature by examining the operations and effects of selected federal labor-management partnerships. We tap a unique set of data to address two questions: (1) what effects did partnerships have on labor-management relations and organizational performance, and (2) through what operational mechanisms were partnership effects realized?

We briefly review previous research on labor-management cooperation and present a conceptual framework. We then use that framework to analyze data on 60 federal sector partnerships located in eight major federal agencies and on partnerships in the broader federal sector. We conclude by speculating about the future of labor-management cooperation generally and labor-management relations in the federal service, given the rescission of E.O. 12871 by President Bush in February 2001.

Previous Research

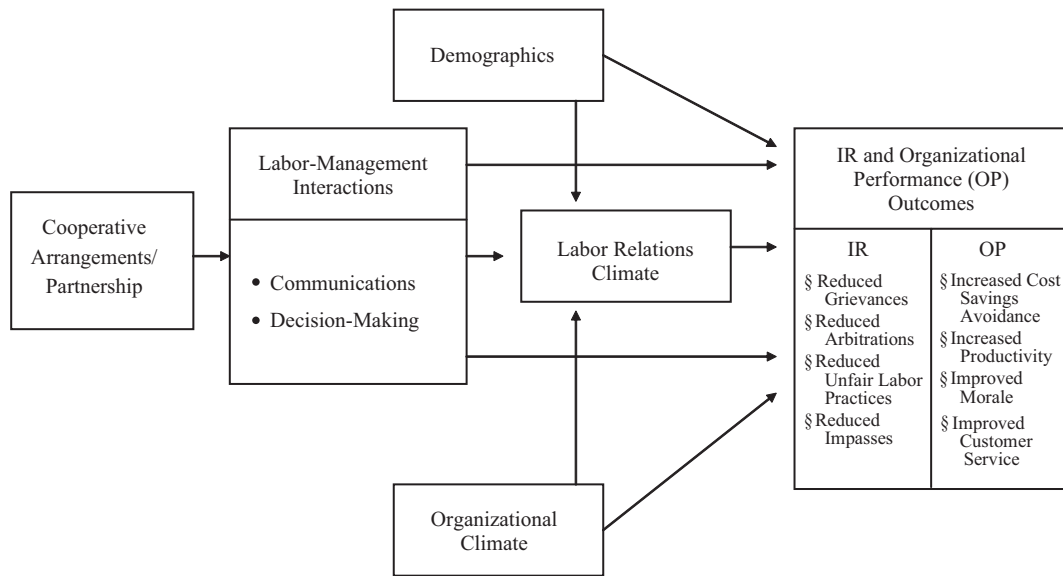
A large volume of diverse research on labor-management cooperation exists both in IR and in related fields (Cooke 1990a; Voos 1987; Kearney and Hays 1995). From these prior studies, we draw several conclusions to inform our conceptual framework and hypotheses. First, labor-management cooperation varies widely in practice, sub-

stance, and form (Gray, Myers, and Myers 1999). Narrowly defined joint labor-management committees lie at one extreme. Co-management arrangements occupy the other end of the continuum. Strategic partnerships, especially those that are given operational breadth and depth, are near the co-managerial side of the spectrum. Generally speaking, labor-management cooperation is treated as distinct from collective bargaining, though it may appreciably affect negotiations.

Second, cooperation can yield substantial improvements at various organizational levels, though empirical research is not uniformly supportive. Cooke (1990a,b; 1992; 1994) identified an array of benefits to employees and employers: for example, an improved quality of work life, reduced labor-management disputes, and improved product quality and financial performance. Voos (1987) found a positive effect of various cooperative programs on perceived product quality, productivity, and financial performance. Cutcher-Gershenfeld (1991) observed positive effects on quality, reduced costs, and higher productivity. However, Katz, Kochan, and Gobeille (1983) found only limited support for the positive effects of cooperative quality-of-work-life initiatives on economic performance. Similarly, Katz, Kochan, and Keefe (1987) obtained mixed results, finding, for example, that cooperative initiatives involving teams did not improve quality, but union involvement in technology implementation did, albeit modestly.

Third, the effects of cooperation appear to be contingent. Potentially important influences include the surrounding labor-management climate (Wagar 1997; Gittell, von Nordenflyct, and Kochan 2004); the intensity of the parties' cooperative effort (Cooke 1990a,b); union involvement in operations (Rubinstein 2000); competencies (Ospina and Yaroni 2003a,b); decision-making relevance (Bluestone and Bluestone 1992; Levine 1995; Kochan and Rubinstein 2000); the stage of development in the cooperative endeavor (Hammer and Stern 1986); and the internal political pressures on union and management represen-

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.



tatives (Hammer, Currall, and Stern 1991). In this context, labor relations climate emerges as an intermediate variable: on the one hand, cooperative efforts are intended to improve the climate; on the other hand, the labor relations climate exerts its own effects on important IR and organizational performance outcomes, including workplace disputes, productivity, quality, production costs, and financial returns (Dastmalchian, Blyton, and Adamson 1989; Katz, Kochan, and Gobeille 1983; Katz, Kochan, and Weber 1985; Norsworthy and Zabala 1985).

Finally, the effects of cooperation operate through specific channels; they do not surface magically, though a cooperative endeavor may possess considerable symbolic import. Cooperation adds value to the extent that it improves communications and decision-making (Levine 1995; Rubinstein 2000; Kochan and Rubinstein 2002). What matters is whether the cooperative structure improves the underlying dynamics of labor-

management interactions. Structure is relevant to the extent that it creates an environment conducive to favorable change, but in and of itself it does not guarantee such progress.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

We present the conceptual framework in Figure 1. It focuses on (1) the expected effects of cooperation on labor relations climate and IR and performance outcomes, and (2) the mechanisms through which cooperation operates—namely, communications and decision-making. We treat climate as an intervening variable, which is an intended effect of cooperation as well as an independent contributor to salient outcomes. By controlling for its effects, as well as various demographic factors and organizational climate, we can isolate the independent effects of communications and decision-making, as central cooperative processes, on performance outcomes.

Theory

Two theoretical perspectives underpin the framework: collective voice and conflict resolution. Both offer explanations for a cooperation-performance nexus. They imply the mechanisms through which cooperation yields benefits.

Collective voice holds that union involvement in decision-making leads to improvements in employee welfare and organizational performance (Freeman and Medoff 1984). It unleashes a string of positive attitudes and behaviors that intensify commitment to the organization. Employees and managers benefit from the accelerated flow of information through expanded communication networks (Rubinstein 2000; Levine 1995). Union participation in decision-making vests its leadership and rank-and-file in the successful implementation of jointly made decisions. Union voice offers a mechanism to address workplace problems and channel discontent into constructive action.

Labor-management cooperation becomes relevant as a way to increase the collective voice of employees through their union representatives. Cooperative efforts commonly emerge because of the inadequacies of traditional forms of union involvement, such as collective bargaining and contract administration. Too frequently, the negotiation and administration of contractual rights and interests produce adversarial relationships that constrict the channels of communications. In addition, collective bargaining occurs near the expiration of contracts, leaving little opportunity for ongoing communications in the interim. Collective bargaining also limits the parties to those subjects that fall under the legal scope of negotiations. With these limitations and liabilities, labor and management often understandably devise alternative structures in which to interact.

Conflict resolution provides a second theoretical rationale (Cutcher-Gershenfeld 1991; Katz, Kochan, and Gobeille 1983; Kochan and Rubinstein 2000). Unresolved grievances impose appreciable costs on organizations. They result in reduced pro-

ductivity, expensive litigation, and delays in implementing change. In addition, they sour the climate, contributing to a low-trust-high-conflict spiral that further debilitates an organization. Workplace disputes produce noticeable "displacement effects," diverting energy from productive uses to destructive entanglements (Katz, Kochan, and Gobeille 1983; Katz, Kochan, and Weber 1985).

When collective bargaining and contract administration become adversarial, they provoke rather than arrest conflictual incidents such as grievances, unfair labor practices, impasses, and charges of discrimination. Labor-management cooperation offers a new forum in which to address issues that give rise to grievances that have the potential to become protracted disputes. A cooperative setting may avert grievances or resolve them in their early stages by encouraging the parties to solve problems rather than litigate. Cooperation suppresses the tendencies of the parties to escalate conflicts. It thus stimulates a more positive labor-management climate, which further reinforces the predisposition to resolve disagreements amicably rather than litigiously.

The collective voice and conflict resolution perspectives provide potent explanations for the expected positive effects of cooperation on labor relations climate, industrial relations outcomes (for example, reduced workplace disputes), and organizational performance. They suggest that these effects are realized through concomitant communications and decision-making processes that promote the flow of useful information and empower the parties to respond decisively. However, competing theories exist (Cooke 1992, 1994). Transaction-cost theory suggests that cooperation may increase the time and energy the parties spend interacting rather than working. Relatedly, cooperation may entail extensive process-oriented (for example, conflict management or team-building) and technical training, which raises business costs. In addition, the monopoly view of unions suggests that they may use cooperation to extract certain benefits, such as

increased job security, which further raise operating costs (Cooke 1992, 1994).

Moreover, cooperative arrangements, however well-intentioned, often face numerous practical difficulties and obstacles that complicate realizing their potential benefits. To succeed, cooperation requires dedicated leadership on both sides. Union and management proponents must often take risks to continue on a cooperative path, particularly if sacrifices are being asked. As Hammer and Stern (1986:337) observed, "Experience with and research on programs of labor-management cooperation in the United States have shown how brittle such cooperative relationships are." Unfortunately, cooperation may offer too little, too late in organizations whose survival is seriously threatened. These situations create the false impression that cooperation has failed.

Hypotheses

We propose four hypotheses. The first two focus on the expected effects of labor-management partnerships as our observed form of cooperation. The latter two involve the mechanisms or processes through which partnership effects occur. We use descriptive survey data and archival and qualitative information to test the hypotheses on partnership effects. We analyze the survey data to assess the mechanisms through which partnerships yield benefits.

Hypothesis 1: Partnerships will provide a forum for collaborative communications and decision-making.

Hypothesis 2: Partnerships will improve the labor relations climate, IR outcomes, and organizational performance.

Hypothesis 3: The degree to which communications and decision-making are perceived as jointly determined will be positively correlated with favorable perceptions of the labor relations climate.

Hypothesis 4: The favorableness with which communications, decision-making, and the IR climate are perceived will be positively correlated with favorable perceptions of organizational performance.

The Federal Context, E.O. 12871, and Partnerships

The Federal Sector

The federal sector is an excellent setting in which to assess the potential benefits of cooperation, especially if the arrangement is structured as a strategic partnership adjunct to collective bargaining. As designed, the statutory federal labor-management system denies unions an influential voice in several important respects. The Federal Service Labor-Management Relations Statute (FSLMRS, or Title VII of the 1978 Civil Service Reform Act) severely limits the scope of bargaining by excluding salient economic issues and granting numerous rights to management alone. In addition, it forbids strikes and limits access to impasse resolution, thereby giving labor few levers with which to pressure management to reach agreement at the negotiating table. Last, the FSLMRS bars unions from negotiating union-security agreements, leaving them with a financially choking free-rider problem (Masters 2004).

Lacking an effective union voice, the federal sector labor-management system had grown disruptively legalistic. The dramatic and ill-fated 1981 Professional Air Traffic Controllers' Organization (PATCO) strike brought these tensions to public notice, but it represented only the tip of an iceberg. Across numerous agencies and departments, labor-management relations had fallen into the low-trust-high-conflict trap. In a 1991 report, the General Accounting Office (1991:2) condemned the existing system: "The federal labor-management relations program is not working well.... [It] is too adversarial and often bogged down by litigation over procedural matters and minutiae." Moreover, the GAO concluded that these adversarial relations impaired the quality of public service.

The economic and political circumstances that converged in the early 1990s were propitious for achieving a transformation of labor-management relations (Osborn and Gaebler 1992). Confronting simultaneous demands to cut the budget

deficit, improve public service, and restore public confidence in democratic institutions, President Clinton embarked on a bold effort to reinvent government (Kettle 1994). His six-month National Performance Review (NPR), headed by former Vice President Gore, recognized that reinvention required a cultural transformation, which, in turn, hinged on transforming labor-management relations from adversarial to cooperative (Kettle and DiIulio 1995). The NPR recommended that the president mandate labor-management partnership in the federal service and create the National Partnership Council (NPC) to guide the process. The NPR (1993:87) stated that “no move to reorganize for quality can succeed without the full and equal participation of workers and their unions.” President Clinton unhesitatingly acted on the NPR’s recommendations.

E.O. 12871. Specifically, President Clinton issued E.O. 12871 on “Labor-Management Partnerships” on October 1, 1993. E.O. 12871 established labor-management partnership as a federal policy, created the tripartite (labor, management, and neutral) NPC, and mandated partnerships throughout the civilian executive branch. In addition, the President expanded the formal scope of bargaining to include previously “permissive” items.

In effect, E.O. 12871 superimposed a new labor-management system onto the inherently defective FSLMRS. By issuing this order, President Clinton made a significant policy change with the stroke of a pen. He thus averted the congressional scrutiny to which his entire reinvention plan—not just partnership—inevitably would have been subjected if he had sought to change policy legislatively.

In particular, E.O. 12871 sanctioned the broad-based “involvement of Federal Government employees and their union representatives” as partners to serve the “customers and mission” of agencies. It viewed such involvement as essential to reinventing government. The order intended for partnership “to establish a new form of labor-management relations” that would break the vicious cycle of labor-management conflict.

The NPC was created to advise the president on labor-management relations and promote partnership across the government. In addition, E.O. 12871 directed agency and department heads to create joint labor-management partnership councils at appropriate organizational levels so as to “involve employees and their union representatives as full partners with management.” Finally, E.O. 12871 ordered agencies to negotiate over previously permissive items, including “the numbers, types, and grades of employees or positions assigned to any organizational subdivision, work project, or tour of duty, or ... the technology, methods, and means of performing work.” E.O. 12871 had a distinctly “co-managerial” tone.

Partnership Councils

Many agencies rushed to comply with the partnership mandate. Within a few months after the issuance of E.O. 12871, partnership councils covered 732,000 employees, or 53% of the union-recognized workforce (NPC 1996). By November 1998, coverage had risen to 67%, or 810,260 bargaining-unit employees (U.S. Office of Personnel Management 1998b). The three largest federal-employee unions had the lion’s share of their bases under councils. Partnership covered 68% of the 648,049 employees represented by the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE); 93% of the 142,317 employees represented by the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU); and 60% of the 121,955 employees represented by the National Federation of Federal Employees, NFFE (OPM 1998b).

Partnerships across the federal sector in general and among our sample in particular exhibited several common structural features. First, most operated under negotiated agreements that established membership criteria and substantive jurisdiction. Second, partnership councils split representation equally between labor and management. Third, management representatives came from the operational and line ranks, not just the labor relations or

human resource management functions. Fourth, a large proportion of labor representatives in partnership councils were drawn from the ranks of elected leadership. Fifth, partnership agreements typically gave councils considerable operational latitude, with the common objective of improving service and accomplishing the agency's mission. These agreements stood in sharp contrast to the inhibiting features of the FSLMRS. Finally, agencies generally structured partnerships pyramidally, building from local to regional to agency-wide councils. Numerous managerial and union council representatives served on more than one council in order to share knowledge across organizational levels.

Methods

In 1999, the NPC, through OPM, commissioned one of the authors to study labor-management partnerships and their effects on agency performance (Masters 2001). Eight federal agencies opted to participate in the evaluation. These agencies vary widely in size, mission, and public visibility. We had no input into which agencies participated. Together, the agencies and departments employed more than 300,000 bargaining-unit employees. Confidentiality agreements preclude us from directly or indirectly identifying agency participants.

Data and Sites

We formed an ad hoc research committee of labor and management representatives and OPM professional staff to provide guidance in partnership-council site selection, questionnaire design, and data-collection. We asked agencies to choose partnerships that (1) varied in effectiveness and (2) provided a reasonable cross-section of their operations. After careful and often intense deliberations, the agencies independently chose 54 local and regional partnership councils for study. In addition, they added the six existing agency-wide councils, yielding a total of 60 partnerships. Partnership-council sites represented

every major geographical region of the United States.

A legitimate question is whether the agencies cherry-picked partnerships to create a favorable impression. Our experience strongly suggests otherwise. Given the confidentiality agreements, the agencies did not fear public disclosure or embarrassment. Each wanted to improve its least effective partnerships. Moreover, based on our extensive site visits we can attest firsthand that the partnerships varied widely, from highly effective to ineffectual. Most partnerships, however, fell somewhere in the broad middle range of performance.

We collected data from three principal sources: surveys; interviews; and archives on partnerships in our sample and the broader federal sector. Specifically, we designed and pre-tested a 93-item questionnaire for each of the 651 union and management representatives serving on the 60 partnership councils. The various items focused on partnership operations and effects, the labor relations climate, labor-management cooperation, organizational climate, and demographics. Agencies administered the surveys according to precise protocols to ensure anonymity and protect the integrity of the data. Parenthetically, as part of the overall study, we also surveyed, with different instruments, randomly selected samples of (1) federal employees located at the partnership sites and (2) local, regional, and national leaders of the three major unions participating in the study. We focus here only on the partnership-council survey results. Generally speaking, similar analyses cannot be replicated across the other samples because of different questionnaire designs.

In addition to surveys, we conducted 298 semi-structured person-to-person interviews with labor and management council representatives on 45 site visits. During these visits, we also interviewed many representatives on the agency-wide councils. Several partnerships granted us the opportunity to observe their proceedings for extended periods of time. Furthermore, over the course of the two-year study, we held lengthy background

Table 1. Characteristics of Samples.

Sample Characteristic	Council Representative (N = 356)		Federal Work Force (N = 2,079)		Union Leader (N = 279)	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<i>Union/Management Status</i>						
Union/BU	141	40.5%	1029	52.7%		NA
Mgmt./NBU	200	57.4%	925	47.3%		NA
<i>Gender</i>						
Female	141	41.5%	1032	52.3%	72	26.8%
Male	199	58.5%	941	47.7%	197	73.2%
<i>Race</i>						
White	274	81.8%	1522	78.7%	209	78.6%
African-American	33	9.9%	233	12.0%	36	13.5%
<i>Occupation</i>						
Professional	111	35.2%	650	32.6%	104	39.1%
Administrative	112	35.6%	427	21.4%	—	—
Technician	41	13.0%	443	22.2%	812	30.5%
Clerical	6	1.9%	204	10.4%	14	5.3%
Wage Grade (WG)	10	3.2%	100	5.5%	31	11.7%
<i>Pay System</i>						
General Schedule (GS)	276	80%	1831	91.0%	237	87.1%
WG	10	2.9%	136	6.7%	29	10.6%
<i>Age</i>		49.28		46.89		49.46
<i>Tenure</i>		19.82		15.21		15.77

sessions on partnerships and labor-management relations with key union professional staff and leaders, federal agency experts, and members of the presidentially appointed NPC. Finally, we collected available documentation of partnership council activities, including minutes of meetings and relevant reports. We complemented these materials with available studies on other federal sector partnerships and Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA) caseload data on impasses, unfair labor practices, arbitration exceptions, and negotiability appeals. A December 2000 OPM report to the president proved especially helpful in providing a wider federal sector perspective.

Sample Characteristics and Measures

Table 1 reports selected characteristics of the partnership-council sample. In brief, the sample was 57.5% management, 58.5% male, 82% white, and 35.2% professional. More than 80% worked in the general sched-

ule (GS) pay system. The average age was 49.4 years.

We do not claim that the sample is representative of partnership-council representatives across the federal service. For a limited comparison, however, in 2000 the federal service was 45% female, 70% white, and 87% GS. The average age and tenure were 46.3 years and 17.1 years, respectively.

To analyze partnership effects using these perceptual survey data, we constructed several indices from the partnership-council survey: communications, decision-making, labor relations climate, and organizational performance (see Appendix). Communications is a two-item measure; decision-making includes four items; labor relations climate, seven; and organizational performance, five. All items use a 1–5 Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

The labor relations climate index is adapted from Dastmalchian, Blyton, and Adamson (1989). The index we use includes seven of the “harmony” items Dastmalchian et al. identified, with minor

wording changes to accommodate a federal sector context. We also developed an organizational climate index to include in subsequent analyses. The index includes 16 items adapted from the Organizational Assessment Survey (OAS) developed by OPM. According to OPM, “[the] OAS assesses dimensions that organizational theory, research, and practice show are related to high performance” (OPM, “The Organizations Assessment Survey,” undated). The OAS covers a range of attitudes on such dimensions as rewards and recognition, communications, fairness and treatment of others, and supervision. For example, one item asks respondents if “recognition and reward are based on merit.”

Methodologies

The ideal would have been to obtain concrete measures at the site level to analyze partnership effects. Unfortunately, site-level data were uniformly unavailable on IR and organizational performance outcomes. The federal agencies did not collect such data at the site levels. In addition, none of the partnerships we studied conducted independent assessments. Nor did they collect objective measures on partnership activities, such as the amount of personnel time spent or the costs of operating councils.

To test the hypotheses, we must therefore rely on archival, interview, and perceptual data, the last of which were collected at the individual rather than site level. We report relevant survey data on perceived partnership effects on IR and organizational performance outcomes. Then we examine qualitative data and other complementary evidence on relevant effects. Finally, we examine empirically the relationship between perceptual data on partnership decision-making and communications, on the one hand, and labor relations climate and organizational performance, on the other.

Partnership Effects

We focus on partnership effects in three areas: communications and decision-making;

labor relations climate; and IR and organizational performance outcomes. We report relevant survey, qualitative, and archival data in each area. Our data reveal the extent to which improvements have occurred over time as a result of partnerships.

Partnership Communications and Decision-Making

The partnership-council survey results on the communications and decision-making indices show generally strong agreement that partnerships provided a forum for collaborative communications and important joint decision-making (Table 2 reports descriptive statistics and correlations among these indices and other items discussed below). In fact, 72.7% of the responding council representatives agreed with the statement that their partnerships involved collaborative rather than confrontational communications. Almost 81% agreed that both sides genuinely listened to each other. In regard to decision-making, more than three-fourths agreed that their councils made formal recommendations to management and that their councils’ recommendations were seriously considered by management.

These overall indices, however, mask important union-management differences in perceptions. Difference-between-means t-tests show that these differences are statistically significant. In each case, union representatives were less positive in their perceptions than were managers.

Interviews substantially corroborated these results. In an overwhelming number of site visits (37 of the 45), a majority of the council interviewees expressed the belief that their partnerships provided a forum for collaboration and relevant decision-making, though many conceded the need for improvement, especially as regards making genuinely *joint* decisions that were binding on the organization. In eight partnerships, most council interviewees did not believe their partnerships either facilitated communications or had decision-making power. They viewed partnership cynically

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Inter-Correlations, Partnership-Council Survey.

Variable	<i>T-Tests</i>		<i>Correlations</i>									
	Mean, Standard Deviation	Union Mean	Management Mean	Communi- cations	Decision- Making	Labor Relations Climate	Improve- ment in Climate	Improve- ment in Commun. Partnership	Coopera- tiveness Since Partnership	Organiza- tional Perfor- mance Climate		
Communications ^a	3.88 (.920)	3.69*	4.01*	—	.567**	.542**	.618**	.689**	.147*	.450**	.590**	.347**
Decision-Making ^b	3.69 (.799)	3.51**	3.82**	.567**	—	.525**	.562**	.631**	.098	.496**	.609**	.437**
Labor Relations Climate ^c	3.47 (.778)	3.14**	3.69**	.542**	.525**	—	.644**	.596**	.265**	.504**	.571**	.668**
Improvement in Climate	3.44 (1.181)	3.25*	3.56*	.618**	.562**	.644**	—	.713**	.101	.657**	.646**	.364**
Improvement in Communications	3.85 (1.083)	3.64*	4.01*	.689**	.631**	.596**	.713**	—	.135*	.561**	.645**	.373**
Cooperativeness Pre-Partnership	2.76 (1.180)	2.45**	3.04**	.147*	.098	.265**	.101	.135*	—	-.159*	.054	.309**
Improvement Since Partnership	3.91 (1.013)	3.88	3.95	.450**	.496**	.504**	.657**	.561**	-.159*	—	.543**	.292**
Organizational Performance ^d	3.21 (.968)	3.13	3.26	.590**	.609**	.571**	.646**	.645**	.054	.543**	—	.321**
Organizational Climate ^e	3.28 (.843)	2.67**	3.71**	.347**	.437**	.668**	.364**	.373**	.309**	.292**	.321**	—

Notes:

^aCommunications is a two-item index, alpha = .86; ^bdecision-making is a four-item index, alpha = .74; ^clabor relations climate is a seven-item index, alpha = .89; ^dorganizational performance is five-item index, alpha = .93; ^eorganizational climate is a 16-item index; alpha = .95.

*Statistically significant at the .05 level; **at the .001 level.

as window-dressing. In each of these cases, however, the sites had a history of intensely adversarial relations or they faced imminent external threats (for example, contracting out to the private sector).

Labor Relations Climate, Communications, and Relationships

Survey results show that council representatives tended to perceive positive changes in various dimensions of labor-management relations. A majority (55%) of council representatives perceived a “high” to “very high” improvement in the labor relations climate because of partnership. Fully four-fifths of the participants also perceived that councils had improved labor-management communications, with relatively high mean scores among both the management and union representatives. In addition, most participants (61.5%) perceived “some” or “very much” improvement in the labor-management relationship since partnership. This represents an important step forward, given that nearly three-fourths of the participants had a neutral-to-negative assessment of the cooperativeness of their labor-management relationship before partnership. Appreciable differences did exist between union and management representatives, with the former holding less positive assessments of the cooperativeness before partnership and the improvement in the climate and communications since partnership.

Interviews and the previously mentioned OPM (2000) report bolster the view that partnerships improved the labor relations climate. An overwhelming majority of interviewees stated that partnerships had brought at least a modest improvement in that respect, though this was not the case in the eight sites where councils were viewed as ineffective. Separate comments by two individuals (one management, one union) summed up a commonly expressed viewpoint: “Our partnership council has helped in creating a better climate for the labor-management relationship”; and “The labor-management partnership council is a good tool to help relations between man-

agement and labor.” We encountered no one who said that partnership worsened conditions, though there were a few sites in which, according to our interviewees, the labor relations climate had deteriorated.

More generally, OPM (2000:21), based on an analysis of 38 federal agency reports submitted to it in compliance with an October 28, 1999, presidential memorandum, concluded, “The rise of partnership has had the greatest impact on the labor-management relations climate. Numerous [agency] reports describe labor-management relations that were adversarial and ineffective before Executive Order 12871 was issued but have improved since then.”

IR and Organizational Performance Outcomes

We asked council participants how they perceived the impact of partnerships on one IR-outcome item and five organization-performance items (cost savings, internal customer service, external customer service, productivity, and employee morale). Participants perceived the strongest effects on IR outcomes (3.55 mean) and internal customer satisfaction (3.42). Mean scores on the other specific dimensions were noticeably lower (cost savings, 3.23; external customer service, 3.05; productivity, 3.03; morale, 3.16). Apart from IR outcomes, the perceived effects were weak, particularly on the more quantifiable dimensions, such as productivity.

While disappointing, these results confirm the impressions we drew from site visits and reviews of available partnership records, especially minutes of meetings. Most of the partnerships we visited paid special attention to avoiding or alleviating workplace disputes, which is why 62% of the council survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their partnerships improved IR outcomes. At the same time, most did not devote special attention to more than one of the specific performance indicators. Some partnerships worked in agencies where customer service is difficult to measure. None that we studied measured morale, productivity, customer ser-

vice, or cost savings at the site level. This does not mean that their partnerships had no effect on these outcomes. It often reflected either a lack of effort to measure effects or the absence of relevant data. For example, several partnerships indicated that they had succeeded in expediting collective bargaining and reducing disputes, but none precisely measured the reductions or the resulting cost savings. OPM (2000:12) found a similar problem in attempting to assess the performance effects of partnership:

We found only 6 agencies [of 38 that reported] have substantially evaluated the impact of partnership on organizational performance. Another 7 agencies have engaged in what we would characterize as moderate evaluation efforts, while the largest number of agencies—17 in all—reported only minimal efforts.... We suspect the absence of good evaluation models accounts for much of the inactivity in this area.

Despite these limitations, we identified numerous instances of positive IR and performance outcomes from site visits, OPM (2000), and other sources. Table 3 highlights some of the noteworthy findings, which we assign to seven classifications: (1) IR outcomes; (2) cost savings/avoidance; (3) customer service; (4) quality; (5) productivity and efficiency; (6) quality of work life; and (7) organizational change. As a rule, partnerships had their greatest effects in those areas where they focused the most attention, even though measuring actual results may not have been a consideration.

First, as might be expected, the most pronounced observable effects occurred on IR outcomes. In most of the sites we visited, council representatives claimed that partnerships reduced grievances, arbitrations, and unfair labor practices—an achievement that met with great satisfaction. OPM (2000) corroborated this finding, and cited several examples based on the agency reports it received. For instance, the Department of Defense reported that its unfair labor practices fell from 3,691 in fiscal year 1993 to 2,231 in fiscal year 1999, which it attributed largely to partnership. More broadly, the FLRA reported a significant fall in its caseload during the

partnership period: unfair labor practices dropped from 8,848 to 5,638 (36%) between fiscal years 1992 and 2000; bargaining impasses fell from 253 to 167 (34%); exceptions to arbitrations declined from 188 to 140 (31%); negotiability appeals dropped from 115 to 65 (49%).

OPM (2000) identified 27 federal agencies that reported moderate-to-substantial effects on cost savings and avoidance. It referenced a report prepared by Booz Allen Hamilton (1999) evaluating partnership at the U.S. Customs Service. This report concluded that the Customs-NTEU partnership yielded net benefits of nearly \$2.46 million, or 20%, between fiscal years 1994 and 1998, a substantial portion of which was realized from reduced workplace disputes. More generally, OPM cited examples of cost savings attributed to reduced labor-management disputes, such as the Social Security Administration (SSA), which reported saving \$7–8 million from a reduction in unfair labor practice disputes.

OPM (2000) also identified 19 agencies, including the U.S. Mint and SSA, that reported at least moderate improvements in customer service. It identified 18 agencies that reported improvements in quality and 24 that showed moderate-to-substantial improvement in productivity, including the U.S. Customs Service. Furthermore, it cited 26 agencies that reported partnership effects on the quality of work life. (We observed several partnerships where concerted efforts had been made to improve the quality of work life, particularly on matters dealing with awards and recognition, career development and promotional opportunities, and flexible work schedules.)

Perhaps the most important partnership effects, however, occurred in the hard-to-measure area of organizational change. Each of the partnerships we studied, including those we were unable to visit, operated where major organizational changes occurred. Organizational redesign often performed dominated the attention of these partnerships. With a few exceptions, partnership councils worked diligently to help effect the change as intelligently and painlessly as possible. In this sense, union voice

Table 4. OLS Survey Analyses.

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Labor Relations Climate</i>	<i>Organizational Performance</i>
Union Rep	.089 (.078)	.192* (.106)
White	-.008 (.078)	-.015 (.105)
Female	-.084 (.063)	-.155* (.085)
Professional	.004 (.065)	.103 (.088)
Tenure	.003 (.004)	.006 (.005)
Organizational Climate	.480*** (.049)	-.131* (.077)
Communications	.245*** (.049)	.231*** (.056)
Decision-Making	.159** (.051)	.467*** (.070)
Labor Relations Climate	—	.390*** (.083)
N	277	268
R ²	.601	.531

*Statistically significant at the .10 level; **at the .05 level; ***at the .001 level (two-tailed tests).

played a critical role. Partnerships aired tensions and sought solutions. They proved invaluable in getting union buy-in to facilitate agency modernization; restructuring; site consolidation; and, on occasion, the introduction of new technologies. In many instances, partnerships proved instrumental in fostering a culture conducive rather than resistant to change. Both parties, it is important to emphasize, often benefited from working together to smooth the process of change. Labor and management served as conscious allies in mitigating hardship.

Analyses

We analyze the council-representative survey data to test more explicitly the two hypotheses on the partnership mechanisms affecting labor relations climate and organizational performance. Two models are estimated, using ordinary least squares

(OLS) regression. The first estimates the effects of the communications and decision-making indices on climate perceptions, with demographics and the organizational-climate index as controls. The second estimates the effects of communications, decision-making, and labor relations climate on performance, with similar controls.

The results support the hypotheses (see Table 4). Communications and decision-making are positively and significantly correlated with labor relations climate. In this analysis, organizational climate is also significantly correlated with labor relations climate. Overall, the model explains an estimated 60% of the variation in individuals' perceptions of the labor relations climate.

In the analyses of organizational performance, communications and decision-making are also statistically significant and positive. Labor relations climate, as hypothesized, is positively and significantly correlated with performance. Organizational climate, however, is negatively correlated with performance. We do not fully understand why this negative association appears, though interviews at certain sites suggest a possibility. In a few of our site visits where the organizational climate appeared to be quite positive, organizational performance was sufficiently strong to render any partnership impact relatively minimal. This is largely, however, a general impression, certainly not a precise assessment. We urge more research to explore the relationship between organizational climate and performance in contexts where partnerships are present.

Overall, the organizational performance model explains 53% of the variation. The union representative coefficient is positive and the female coefficient is negative. Union representatives' positive correlation corresponds with impressions we gathered from interviews. Partnership council union representatives tended to see stronger effects than did their management counterparts.

One question that might arise is whether much of the variance in labor relations climate and organizational performance

was accountable to differences between sites rather than within sites. To examine this possibility, we conducted a hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) analysis. Our results (which are available on request) indicate that site-level measures of communications, decision-making, and organizational climate explain only 2–3% of the variance in individuals' perceptions of labor relations climate. Similarly, site-level measures of these variables plus labor relations climate explain only 2–3% of variance in organizational performance attitudes. (To compute these percentages, we followed Hofmann's [1997] and Raudenbush and Bryk's [2002] formulas for estimating intra-class correlations.)

Discussion and Conclusions

Several conclusions emerge with important implications for labor-management cooperation in general and in the federal sector particularly. First, partnerships produced some demonstrably positive effects. The main effects were in labor-management relations and outcomes. E.O. 12871 contributed to a transformation in labor-management relations, manifested by a more harmonious labor relations climate and reduced workplace disputes.

Second, partnership effects on organizational performance are more difficult to discern. The clearest effects appeared in the form of cost savings attributed to reduced disputes. More broadly, the lasting effects may have been in facilitating change and diminishing friction between labor and management incident to the seemingly endless flow of reorganizations and restructurings undertaken while partnerships were in place. While such dynamics are not amenable to precise estimation, partnerships appeared to be most effective when they contributed to a cultural disposition conducive to the acceptance and efficient implementation of changes involving organizational redesign.

Third, partnerships were most effective when efforts were more or less precisely targeted. Councils that focused on improving customer satisfaction, reducing work-

place disputes, and increasing productivity achieved demonstrable results. This explicit focus gave councils a driving purpose linked to measurable goals, in contrast to more global ambitions such as furthering the agency's "mission" or promoting cultural change.

Finally, partnerships outside the framework of collective bargaining were able not only to arrest the adversarial dynamics of formal negotiations, but even to reverse them. Our interviews turned up reports of many cases in which management and union representatives, many with no prior bargaining experience, made surprising gains in decision-making when they were brought together in an environment where—in contrast to traditional, adversarial face-offs—their respective interests did not seem completely incompatible or acutely vulnerable, and they did not feel the need to bluff or posture in ways that can hinder communication. To a large extent, it is changing the dynamics of prevailing labor-management interactions by introducing new faces and a new environment that makes partnership a potentially effective forum for communications and decision-making. A moral of the story is that if you want to transform labor-management relations, you need to change the process, environment, and mix of people. Partnerships achieve their ultimate impact when partnering, collective bargaining, and contract administration become seamlessly cooperative.

Three important implications emerge from this study. The most compelling is that cooperation can be mandated and still produce important effects. This runs against the conventional wisdom that partnerships should emerge voluntarily (for example, Rubin and Rubin 2001). Partnership in the federal sector would not have occurred on anywhere near the scale it did simply from the voluntary actions or good intentions of the parties. There was far too much distrust and hostility for such an outcome to occur naturally. A deliberate, unambiguous policy directive was an inescapable precondition. This suggests that a national policy or state-level equivalents mandating cooperation in the public sec-

tor or even private sector could produce positive results.

Second, the removal of a partnership mandate does much more than create a neutral labor-management environment. When President Bush rescinded E.O. 12871 on February 17, 2001, he did much more than erase a few words. Although E.O. 13201 did not outlaw partnership, it did dismantle the NPC and repudiate all agency directives issued to further compliance with the Clinton mandate. Moreover, it sent a clear signal to partnership antagonists that they have a license to discontinue cooperation.

Finally, abandoning partnership, however imperfect it may have been, deprives federal employees of an avenue to exercise a collective voice much wider in scope than formal contract negotiations. To the extent that the availability of this voice reduced conflict, its closure risks an escalation in tensions and disputes. A reversion to adversarial relations becomes ever more likely. Indeed, there is preliminary evidence of a return to more confrontational labor-management relations. According to the National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA), between 1999 and 2003, the number of arbitrations it pursued annually rose from 37 to 78. Furthermore, NATCA is now involved in 11 bargaining impasses.

More broadly, Bush's rescission presaged a much more severe threat to labor-management cooperation. *The President's Management Agenda*, issued in August 2001, stressed managerial flexibility while being

deafeningly silent on labor relations. The tragic events of September 11, 2001, set in motion a series of organizational developments in which the doctrine of managerial flexibility was used to justify curbing labor rights. In creating the Transportation Security Administration (TSA, which federalized the airport screeners) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Congress granted the agency heads the authority to set bargaining rights. At TSA, the Bush administration denied the screeners the right to unionize. At DHS, the administration has proposed a dramatically revised labor-management system that further circumscribes the scope of bargaining and expands managerial rights beyond the FSLMRS. In addition, the Department of Defense has proposed a new National Security Personnel System (NSPS), which would even more significantly limit the bargaining rights of approximately 750,000 civilian employees.

These seemingly unrelated events, coupled with E.O. 13201 and the aggressive pursuit of contracting out of federal services, have soured federal sector labor-management relations. As the president of the NFFE said about the NSPS: "It's time to take this proposal and make a performance appraisal for George W. Bush and vote him out in 2004. Period! It eliminates collective bargaining, abruptly terminates contracts in place, and has a number of other union-busting time bombs." Federal-sector labor-management relations today unfortunately is reminiscent of August 1981, shortly before the PATCO debacle.

Appendix

Questionnaire Items in Key Measures

<i>Measure</i>	<i>Survey(s)</i>	<i>Item(s)</i>
<i>Labor Relations Climate</i> 7 Items 1-5 Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)	Partnership Council; Federal Work Force; Union Leader	1. Labor and management work together to make this a better place in which to work. 2. Labor and management have respect for each other's goals. 3. Labor and management in this agency keep their word. 4. In this agency, negotiations take place in an atmosphere of good faith. 5. The collective bargaining agreement is regarded as fair by employees in this agency. 6. Employees generally view the conditions of their employment here as fair. 7. A sense of fairness is associated with labor-management dealings in this agency.
<i>Cooperativeness</i> 1 Item 1-5 Scale (1 = Very Uncooperative, 5 = Very Cooperative)	Partnership Council; Federal Work Force; Union Leader	1. How cooperative was the relationship between management and labor prior to the establishment of your labor-management partnership council?
<i>Improvement</i> 1 Item 1-5 Scale (1 = Has Deteriorated Very Much, 5 = Has Improved Very Much)	Partnership Council; Federal Work Force; Union Leader	1. To what extent has the labor-management relationship improved since your labor management partnership council was established?
<i>Organizational Performance</i> 5 Items 1-5 Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)	Partnership Council	1. Your partnership council's actions have resulted in: (a) Cost savings/cost avoidance (b) Improved internal customer service (c) Improved external customer service (d) Increased productivity among employees (e) Increased employee morale and job satisfaction
<i>Communications</i> 2 Items 1-5 Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)	Partnership Council	1. In your partnership council the communication between labor and management is collaborative, rather than confrontational. 2. In your partnership council, labor and management genuinely listen to each other.
<i>Decision-Making</i> 4 Items 1-5 Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)	Partnership Council	1. Your partnership council makes formal recommendations to management. 2. Your partnership council's recommendations are seriously considered by management. 3. Your partnership council implements its own recommendations. 4. Your partnership council is an important decision-making body.

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