

Name: G4S Cash Services (UK)
Union Role: National Negotiation Committee reps
Union: GMB
Size: c7000 cash services UK
Sector: Cash transit
Location: National initiative – 48 cash transit sites
Issue: General collaboration and violent robberies against staff

The organisation and the role of the workplace representative

Group 4 Securicor (G4S) was formed following the merger of Group 4 and Securicor in 2004. The company now operates in 110 different countries and employs over 600,000 employees. The activities of the G4S cash business in the UK business cover 'cash centres' and 'cash in transit'. Cash centres, incorporate two secure facilities used to store and prepare cash for banks. Cash in transit involves the secure movement of cash from and to businesses around the country. Approximately 7,500 workers are employed across this business in the UK. G4S recently signed an international framework agreement with the UNI Global Union Federation. The GMB has sole recognition rights (except for Basingstoke Cash Centre), with a membership density of mid-80 per cent for the cash services division.

The issue

Historically, relations between union and management had been poor. Despite union membership being high, recognition was not granted until 2000. Relations did not improve as the GMB sought to harmonise terms and conditions between the two divisions of the company, CIT Ltd and Cash Services, a move which was opposed by the company. Relations were fraught when the union won a strike ballot in 2002 in support of a pay claim. As the market leader, transporting cash for most of the UK's banks and leading retailers, the wider impact of industrial action would have had serious implications for client relations. This acted as a stimulus for management to re-evaluate their relationship with the union and request Acas intervention and mediation. As a result the GMB postponed/cancelled industrial action.

With Acas support the "Working Together" initiative was established. This brought together the Operations and Human Resources Directors with the GMB's National Negotiating Committee (NNC) reps. The initiative was designed to break down barriers and change the perceptions and stereotypes each party had of the other. The initiative successfully 'broke the ice' and fostered an open dialogue between union and management. Quarterly national meetings were established, along with separate lower level regional and branch meetings.

Innovative collaborative working developed rapidly following the harmonisation of pay and conditions across cash centres and cash in transit in 2005. There was a recognised joint concern for the safety of cash in transit crews, who had witnessed a significant increase in violent attacks the previous year. Management and union had a joint interest in the safety of the crews and developed a successful external campaign to promote change through a new 'Attacks Campaign'. This developed at three levels.

First, it was identified that in certain areas the police could be doing more to protect the vehicles and crews, for example following a van if they were not engaged in other activities. The NNC and regional union reps successfully persuaded a number of Chief Police Officers and attacks in a significant number of those areas began to fall.

Second, it was also recognised that the further away the vehicle needed to park from the customer premises the more vulnerable to attack the crew was. Management therefore conducted discreet negotiations with retailers and banks, successfully getting a number of them to change their procedures and allow vans as close to the premises as possible.

Third, the location of many clients in pedestrianised areas and other parking restrictions was resulting in over £800,000 in parking fines per year. The GMB and management lobbied local councils and central government for temporary parking allowances in such areas, to avoid crew over exposure on the street. The GMB was particularly useful in bringing additional pressure through local media. One union official stated that:

"The role of the Negotiating Rep has developed since the early days. They now sit on many committees and address a wide range of agendas. They represent and push for the guys on the streets but do so by collaborating with management at a senior levels ... The Attacks Committee was established so that senior National Negotiating Reps can meet on a fairly regular basis with directors in the company as well as to apply pressure where the company cannot due to their responsibility to their clients".

How we benefited from effective collaborative working

Collaborative working generated many benefits for the company, the union and employees. Following the initial pay dispute the relationship between management and the GMB has improved considerably. Old stereotypes have been quashed, lines of communication have improved, and finding 'common ground' is more likely when disputes arise. The improved relationship at senior levels, in addition to improvements in employee pay and conditions, has resulted in better relations at branch level – this has been reinforced by additional joint training for local reps and branch managers.

The Attacks Campaign operates at a senior level and discussions focus specifically on the issue of attacks; other concerns, for example pay and conditions, are not addressed at these meetings. However, cooperative

relations with regards to the welfare and safety of the workforce have led to better relations over other employment issues. All parties reported a 'fundamental and strong level of trust' and a greater understanding of the others' views. This has led to other initiatives, around, for example, harassment and bullying policy and an agreement on a new disciplinary matrix.

The Attacks Campaign has resulted in real changes to operating procedures and attacks against crews have fallen. Employees have new body armour and vehicles and clients have changed their procedures, even at a financial cost to themselves, to make the transit safer. The pressure on councils has led, in some cases, to permits for security vans in pedestrianised areas and exemptions from parking penalties in others. There are also discussions over the waiving of outstanding fines.

Finally, by changing the way in which workers were paid, a surplus has been generated in terms of tax relief. A third of this surplus goes to the employer, a third to employees and a third is put into an 'attack fund'. This fund is used to help support seriously injured employees following an attack. Again, union and management worked together in establishing the details of the fund. Workers were consulted and the vast majority voted in favour of the scheme.

What we would do differently

The main challenge was 'finding the space' to develop a relationship. This came through the pay negotiations in 2005, where a four year pay deal was agreed. This gave both management and union space to work on collaborative projects and further develop their relationship.

Both union and management representatives agreed that, although good working relations existed at senior level, some branch officials and branch managers still exhibited 'old fashioned' adversarial attitudes. This was overcome through joint branch training and strong support for the 'new' relationship from above, with senior union officials and management prepared to intervene if difficulties arose at lower levels.

A final potential difficulty related to the use of the media, as client companies were sensitive to being linked in any way to violent attacks. The use of the media was therefore predominantly focussed around campaigns at local council or central government level.