

## **"NOT JUST AN OPERATOR"**

### **How The Manitoba Telephone System (MTS) & Communication, Energy & Paperworkers Union (CEP) Jointly Implemented Work Redesign**

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**On behalf of the Manitoba Telephone System and the Communications Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada Local 55, I wish to thank you for this invitation to review with you our experience with the Operator Services Re-design Project. We will be presenting the highlights of the past five years and the experience of designing, implementing and participating jointly in this project.**

**This project has been named M-POWER; that stands for and summarizes the goal of the project. There is no meaning attached to the M. The rest stands for Professional Operators With Enhanced Responsibilities. Since it's inception this Operator Service Project has been a joint undertaking of MTS and CWC. MTS is a Crown Corporation and a member of Stentor. It's mission is "To meet the telecommunications needs of all Manitobans with the right solutions, outstanding service and superior products."**

**MTS employs over 4500 people throughout the Province with major administration centers in Winnipeg, Brandon, Selkirk and Thompson. There are approximately 650 Operators. Operator Services Offices are located in these cities and in several smaller communities. MTS is 98% Unionized. Employees are represented by three Unions: The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers representing Craft, The Telecommunications Employees Association of Manitoba representing Management, and the Communication Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, representing Clerical and Operators.**

**In November of 1992, the name of the union changed with a merger between the Communications and Electrical Workers of Canada (CWC), the Energy and Chemical Workers Union and the Canadian Paperworkers Union. The new union is called the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, (CEP) representing 140,000 members from coast to coast to coast. The CEP is affiliated to the Canadian Labour Congress and all subordinate bodies. The Local changed from number 5 to 55. At MTS, the CEP has two Locals, Local 7 representing clerical staff and Local 55 which represents the Operators. We will use the names CEP Local 55 and CWC Local 5 in the presentation to maintain the historical perspective.**

Over the next 45 minutes we will:

- \* Provide a Historical Perspective
- \* Review the Project structure and Process
- \* Discuss the Decision Making Process used on the Project.
- \* Give you an update on the current status.
- \* Review the work of several Joint Task Forces, how MTS/CWC have worked together to solve problems and bring about change.
- \* Review the benefits to MTS/CWC

In 1986 there was a power surge at our Winnipeg Office. The power outage caused the screens on our Operator Positions to shut off and come back on in a surge. Soon after, Operators in our Long Distance Office experienced what we called sensations or shock like incidents. These varied from tingling in the finger tips, numbness in their face to an operator being taken to the hospital by ambulance.

There was a STOP WORK Order issued for our Directory Assistance office in January of 1986. In the beginning; the incidents were only being reported in our Directory Assistance office; by the summer of 86 they were being reported in our Long Distance office. The number of incidents that were reported throughout the whole history were 300, effecting about 75 to 100 operators. We have Operator Services throughout the province yet all the shocks were reported in one building in Winnipeg.

Technical investigations occurred throughout this period of time. There were internal and external people conducting investigations, trying to understand what was happening and trying to determine whether there was a problem with the equipment.

In September of 1986 the Operators exercised their right to refuse unsafe work. In October of 86 the Winnipeg Toll office was closed and a Stop Work Order was issued. Remedial measures continued to be tried. Operators were moved from this building to other buildings and locations. This involved travel and organizational difficulties for both MTS and the Operators.

The direct cost to MTS over this time was over one million dollars. The emotional trauma was great. This situation was difficult for MTS managers and the CWC Executive. No one knew whether this was a technical problem or whether someone was playing a cruel joke. There were rumors that a technician some place was zapping operators. It was a real dilemma with a lot of fear and concern.

The technical investigations said the equipment was safe. It stated that although there was electrostatic discharge there was nothing that would create the kind of response we were seeing.

In 1987 an external biomedical engineer by the name of Monty Raber delivered a joint report which pulled together all the investigations that had been done. The report indicated that all the equipment was safe. The recommendation was to continue the efforts