

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

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

**Presentation By:**  
**Jo-Anne Swayze**  
**President, Local 55, CEP**  
**&**  
**Alma Bromilow**  
**M-Power Project Coordinator, MTS**

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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

to minimize the electrostatic discharge. The Raber Report recommended that MTS improve the work area and that there be JOINT LABOUR MANAGEMENT effort to achieve better communication, resolve grievances and improve working conditions.

While the technical investigation were going on Human Resources had become involved. The research they did suggested that this would occur in an environment where there was a breakdown in the ability to cope with the stress inherent in highly automated, repetitive, routine closely measured, high productivity tasks. Occupational Health and Safety in the U.S. was looking at it, and Australian Telecom was reporting a similar situation.

In February of 1988, MTS and CWC agreed to work together on a joint project. Certainly the motivation for both organizations was the crisis, we had a disruption to customer service and incredibly negative media attention along with the high cost of the unsuccessful technical investigations.

I said a minute ago this was looked upon as a reaction to stress a highly repetitive work situation. Let me describe to you what Operator Service's was like. The operators are key to good customer service, they efficiently give information and provide service to a variety of customers. MTS operators handle over 200,000 customer contacts daily, each operator handles 700 - 1000 calls per day.

At this point they were being remotely monitored. When they wanted to go to the washroom they almost had to raise their hand and say "Please may I?". Coffee breaks were 15 minutes exactly, you unplugged and plugged back 15 minutes later, not earlier because then you'd have too many operators on the board and not later because then you would not have enough operators on the board. This is a very closely measured organization.

Modern operators felt like an extension of the machine rather than valued for their contribution. Operators were given technical training but were limited in the education that would broaden their knowledge of the Corporation, it's business, it's products and service.

Operator Services Managers were also under pressure. The way the organization defined the operator's job also defined the way the managers were to manage. The front line manager in Operator Services was a disciplinarian and an enforcer of rules. During this crisis the Managers went to Human Resources requesting help. They needed to be better informed, to learn to communicate, to have more autonomy and decision making authority. They needed more training and development to help them manage in the 80' and 90's. Neither the Operators nor the managers respected the other's situation. It was the external consultants that provided that link later on in the process.

There were many external forces influencing MTS at that time. Operator Services was subject to intense technological change, competition was looming on the horizon; all of these forces were coming to bear at the same time. Precipitated by the shock like incidents,

focused by the developmental needs of managers and the Raber report, there was a readiness to look at an innovative program.

How did we get this to be a Joint Project? Human Resources had researched an article by Gareth Morgan of York University and they arranged to talk to him. He was up front with us and advised us that it was so important to involve the Union that he wouldn't talk to us until we had their approval. With Gareth Morgan's help we identified all of the key stakeholders. They were numerous. We began by working with the front-line executive of both CWC and MTS.

With the reports supporting the investigations we explained our plan for an approach to this problem. We asked for agreement and our strategy was to request their support to sponsor us to the next level in their organization. We kept going upward until together; both MTS and CWC ended up at the Provincial Ministers office. It was important to get that kind of political support. Our Conga Line took us 6 months before we walked all the way through both of these organizations. This was the key to providing the right foundation for this project. The Pilot finally started in February of 1988.

I began working on this project in Feb. '88 when the CWC Vice President of the Western Region asked me to sit on the Start up Committee. The Start up Committee consisted of 3 union members and 3 managers. It was our responsibility to get budget approval for the project, to select the external consultant and to select the members of the Design Team.

We secured budget approval from the MTS Executive and selected Bert Painter, a Social Scientist with the B.C. Research Council and Helen Maupin of the Workplace Innovation Centre, MB as external consultants.

Five of us remained on to be members of the Design Team. The Design Team also consisted of 3 union and 3 management and like the Start Up Committee was jointly co-chaired and minutes were kept of our work.

In May '88, a Letter of Understanding was signed by MTS and CWC. This letter of understanding defined the project. In the Letter, MTS made

- \* the financial commitment
- \* Operators were exempted from the usual productivity measures
- \* Exemptions from some of the terms of the contract and MTS policies
- \* participation was voluntary
- \* The union agreed that no policy grievances would be filed against the project
- \* implementation by mutual agreement only

The Design Team developed an Action Statement that guided our work.

"To trial organizational and managerial systems and processes that will improve the working environment by reorganizing work, improving communication, empowering employees and managers to be more directly involved in decisions while maintaining and improving the level of customer service."

As Design Team members, we knew that we did not have all of the ideas for change. We also knew that it was important to involve as many people as possible in the project. We held Educational Sessions for 90 operators and managers. These sessions included mini lectures on Socio-technical principles, work redesign and we had guest speakers from Mountain Bell who had conducted an change project in Arizona in the early 80's. The educational session ended with these participants green lighting there ideas for change in Operator Services.

Forty-five of these participants attended sessions we called Design Panels. They started with the ideas generated at the end of the Educational sessions, added more and worked on concepts for change. It total, about 30 different concepts resulted and became the framework for the Design Team to use in setting up the Trial Office.

The Trial office opened in November '88 with 40 operators and one manager selected by lottery from a list of volunteers. The size and structure of the office was a trial in itself, the traditional offices were either very large, over 100 operators with 4 or 5 managers or small remote offices with a staff of 25 and 1 manager.

We redesigned the work by including both long distance and directory assistance equipment in the office and cross trained operators to work both services. The traditional offices contained one service and very few operators had the chance to learn both.

We enriched the jobs by rotating the operators through other job functions in the office. The administrative and clerical support functions were traditionally done by one person, in the Trial Office the job was divided into 4 tasks and several operators rotated through the job. The In Charge responsibility was also given to the operators and any one of them could be in charge of the office when the manager was not present.

We believed the operators were empowered in the running of their office. There was an office committee that consisted of the manager, a steward and 3 operators. This committee established office policy and was involved in most managerial decisions. Discipline and individual job performance were still the manager's responsibility. All decisions were made by consensus, the committee had a chair and minutes were kept.

We asked the operators to take risks to provide better customer service. Over the years, guidelines about handling customers and different types of calls had become hard fast rules from which no one could deviate. We told the operators that they could take risks and deviate from the practices if they believed that it resulted in good customer service.

Communication was improved. Monthly meetings were conducted by the office committee with the staff in the Trial Office. The committee set the agenda. It included office policy issues as well as customer service issues.

Education was increased in the Trial Office. Many of the operators were eager to get involved but in many cases lacked the skills required. Not only did they lack some of the technical skills, they needed education on how to work in a committee environment so courses were conducted on problem solving, communication & feedback, consensus decision making, conflict resolution and leadership.

The Management role was changed. We asked the front line manager to become the unit manager, the team leader, a coach and a mentor instead of being the enforcer of the rules.

The trial duration was 8 months and the Trial office continued on until the reorganization recommendation was implemented.

After the Trial Office opened, the Design Team began to discuss potential recommendations that could arise from the Project. The question became, who will make the decision on our recommendations? Under the guidance of our Consultant, the Design Team invited key individuals in senior positions of the union and the company to form a Committee called the Trustees. The group consisted of 3 MTS Vice Presidents, initially, Customer Service, Human Resources and the Executive VP, and the CWC National Representative and the Presidents of the 2 Locals who were the interim bargaining committee.

The first meetings were of an educational nature and were filled with posturing. Both sides, especially the union, were suspicious of the process. This was a new way of making decisions for CWC and MTS. The consultant lead the group through the process of change and discussed the theory and philosophy. We also discussed the Trial Office and what was happening there in terms of change and potential recommendations to prepare them for the package.

In July '89, the Design Team presented the Trustees with the 22 recommendations. The Design Team disbanded and two members remained to validate the evaluation data and to play a resource role for an Interim group established by the Trustees. This interim group consisted of the CWC Trustees and 3 MTS managers who researched the recommendations and did an independent analysis to verify the accuracy of the costs and evaluation data. In most cases, they concurred with the recommendations and in some cases added new ideas and improved upon the justification that the Design Team had presented.

The Design Team conducted a detailed evaluation and collected hard and soft data. The hard data included grievances, customer complaints and commendations, productivity indicators, absenteeism and turnover.

The 2 areas I worked on were grievances and customer contacts received by public relations. One of the conclusions reached was that if a grievance was not settled at the verbal stage, it would progress to the 4th and final step. Very few were settled at Step 2 & 3. One unit accounted for the majority of the grievances, I remember saying it was because

of the managers who were in that unit and a senior manager rebutted that it was because of the number of union activists in that unit.

The customer complaints from Public Relations showed that 30% of the complaints pertained to rude and discourteous operators. 40% were directly related to the directory assistance data base, (the number wasn't listed or the operator couldn't find the listing). These statistics supported our recommendation on improving the data base.

The soft data collected included interviews with the operators in the experiment as well as interviews with the "resistors". Some of these individuals were offended that they were labeled this way while others appreciated the opportunity to express their opinions.

A Job Diagnostic survey was done before the Trial Office opened and again 8 months later. The results from the Trial Office staff were isolated and compared to the rest of operator services. We noted that the operators in the Trial office expressed a higher degree of satisfaction in the job and scored higher when asked about opportunities to learn new things and to voice their opinions on office policy.

By March of '90, the Trustees had reached agreement on 9 of the recommendations and put together a document called Fast Forward to the Future. It included a Letter of Understanding, and each recommendation was listed with supporting background material.

This document was given to every Operator Services employee and each one had the opportunity to attend a presentation to discuss the package on company paid time. A total of 43 two hour presentations were held throughout the province. Union members voted to ratify the package and the MTS Executive Committee approved it.

Two recommendations applied solely to management and 3 were referred to the negotiation process. 2 more have been dealt with through subsequent joint ventures. A tentative Agreement has been reached on 3 more and 3 are left. They deal with job reclassification and a new concept in the wage structure, obviously very sensitive issues for the CEP to deal with. The Trustee Committee continues to meet to discuss outstanding recommendations, new joint initiatives and problems that arise with the implementation.

An evaluation is currently underway to assess the impact of the Project after the implementation of the 9 recommendations. That report supports the change to date, identifies that change has been slow and challenges the Trustees to look at structural change within Operator Services to encourage a higher degree of empowerment and participative management.

One of the weaknesses of the process was the lack of involvement of the Regions in the early stages. The shocks were viewed as a Winnipeg problem, therefore the Project and the recommendations were viewed as a Winnipeg solution. However, The Letter Of Understanding and 9 recommendations impacted Operator Services throughout the

province. In an attempt to overcome this resistance, a Regional Vice President was added to the Trustee Group and union and management regional liaisons were selected to lead the implementation in the province. The Liaison Group meets quarterly to discuss problems, generate solutions and coordinate implementation ideas.

The two M-POWER Project Coordinators represented the company and the union. Jo-Anne was the Vice-President of the Local and I had been in the management ranks for 8 years. It was our responsibility to implement the 9 Recommendations reflecting both work redesign and change in the work process.

**MEDIUM SMALL WORK GROUPS:** required a physical move of equipment and relocation of staff from three large groups with specific services {numbering 300 operator with definite services} to six groups with both Services.

**ELIMINATION OF REMOTE MONITORING:** was immediate.

**CROSS TRAINING:** - Gives the Operators and Service Assistants training to be equally competent in Long Distance and Directory Assistance. It was felt that this would give some variety to the operators daily job. The plan leaned heavily on the individual responsibilities of the Operators to maintain their new skills. We empowered them. Managers were to encourage their work groups to maintain their skill by following the established program.

When push came to shove the Managers took the quick painless route to solve a surge in work by bringing Service Assistants back to their unit off and on through out their cross training, leaving some of them without sound skills.

We learned that when change becomes uncomfortable people will ignore what doesn't feel good. They had forgotten that this was an enhancement to their jobs, they viewed it as a royal pain and stopped maintaining their skills. The result was poor customer service and confusion in the offices. We have learned a valuable lesson.

Change is a slow process and learning something new is not everyone's challenge. In a structured environment such as Operator Services, to go from the situation where everyone knew exactly what they were doing and put them in an environment where they had to ask one another for answers left them feeling uncomfortable with their role in the changing work place. They had always taken pride in their job knowledge. Information was not freely shared, rules abounded and there was a definite protocol that was followed if one wanted information. The situation made them feel inadequate where once they were "the expert". We have learned to move slowly and to reinforce the process and monitor the learning constantly.

**THE ANSWER PHRASE:** is MTS ..... SPEAKING, MAY I HELP YOU? It was designed to BRAND the service, and PERSONALIZE it with a name.



What looked to be a simple implementation of this recommendation has proved to be a challenge. It has been a difficult adjustment for the "dyed in the wool" OPERATOR, to move from the reserved unknown voice, with no face; to that of a real person with a name. They site the abuse that some customers heap upon them as a major concern.

**UNLIMITED TRADES:** provides flexibility in Operator Shifts and removed the restrictions on operator's trades.

**CAG AGREEMENT:** Our internal (Central Administration Group) was asked to allow each individual unit to strike an agreement with them to have more flexibility and autonomy for scheduling within each work Unit.

**EDUCATION:** requires 5 days of training per Operator per Year. Portions of the Information Exchange if it contains a presentation from within MTS on products or services is considered educational.

**COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK:** - It was recognized that our operators are front line to the customer, as you heard earlier; one operator handles 700 to 1000 requests from customers per shift. They needed to have accurate information on products and services MTS provides, and to keep the communication channel open within each office to promote a healthy working relationship. This has been accomplished by holding Information Exchanges in every work unit once a month for a two hour period.

To help the operators and managers understand the process and provide some of them an opportunity to learn the skills required to plan and prepare, Information Exchange workshops were held.

**DEDICATED TRAINING:** - Provides a room designed for Long Distance and Directory Assistance training to take place away from the floor of the office and allows training to be uninterrupted.

All of these have led to the involvement of MTS Management and Local 55 in three joint ventures. I'll take a few minutes to tell you of these projects.

For those of you who have never worked as an operator, I would like to explain that their job is 24 hour coverage, 7 days a week, with split shifts, scheduled coffee breaks and scheduled lunch breaks.

Our traffic is measured every fifteen minutes by the volume of calls and the Operators are scheduled accordingly. An operator could work a different shift every day of the week. To an operator, their hours of work are the most important part of their job.

In 1986 when the walkout happened, MTS realized they needed to maintain survivability in case of a disaster. For the first time Operator Services maintained a satellite office.

Two large work groups were each split into two separate units. This resulted in Junior Operators getting better shifts than Senior Operators.

The operators were very unhappy, the stress level was on the way up and the managers were once again confronted with a bad situation. When the shift scheduling problems could not be resolved, the Union filed group grievances. When that did not work, a policy grievance was filed. With still no solution in sight, the Union filed 188 individual grievances in one week.

This resulted in a Joint Scheduling Committee to discuss union and management concerns. The information sharing was good for both sides. The Union got a clearer understanding of scheduling and management showed commitment to finding a solution. The short term plan consisted of enhancements made to the old scheduling system and trialed for six months.

A Project Manager was assigned to find a new scheduling program. Alternate scheduling systems were presented to the committee. The committee took into consideration the changing work environment of Operator Services.

The project manager interviewed Operators to ensure their input. The Operators felt they had been involved in solving the problem. Four years ago this never would have happened. CWC and MTS agreed to the selection of a new system.

Operators now move between work units due to scheduling by Seniority Overall, rather than Seniority in the Work Unit. This change was communicated to all of the Operators at the Information Exchanges held for all the Units and improved communication, ensuring a very positive result of this project.

An exciting project was put forward at the request of the Trustee Committee; and a CWC/MTS team was formed to research new Operator Services Technologies and additional Services that would bring in revenue. The Executive of CWC were asked to participate and ensured Regional as well as Urban representation. Management was seconded to the project according to the functions they performed within MTS. The committee chose the name; Journey of Operator Services Into New Technology.

**The Committee's objectives were:**

To see new technologies that would enable MTS to provide excellent customer service and develop additional operator services revenue, while enhancing and expanding the job of the operator.

Their mandate was to discover, discuss and report their findings. Three Canadian and eight American Telco's were toured. They visited the facilities of two directory assistance data base vendors and invited a third vendor to make a presentation in Winnipeg.

The committee worked well together, kept an open mind, looked for new and exciting features that could be incorporated into any new operator positions that MTS would be purchasing in the future. They focused on the Operator Positions and saw many workstations that were ergonomically designed and contributed to the health and well-being of the Operators. Handling long distance and directory assistance at a common position is a concept being embraced by Canadian Telcos. It was of interest to the team because it fit well with the concept of job enhancement.

Services such as Voice Response for Directory Assistance and Automated Alternate Billing Service reduce operating expenses and serve as platforms for new revenue generating services offerings. This was what the group was looking for; something that would create revenue and maintain operator jobs. The Directory Assistance Data Bases viewed offered operators accuracy and faster retrieval of information for better customer service.

Technology can be put to use in many ways and the capabilities are endless. However, operators must be willing to look toward the future and see that their traditional roles are changing.

In all the Telcos the number of Managers and Operators have decreased with the introduction of new technology. The Telcos stated that surplus staff have been absorbed through attrition, early retirement, re-location, retraining and the creation of new services. This was one of the big questions all members of the team had.

None of the Telcos they visited had a joint Union Management project, such as M-POWER which focuses on Employee / Management involvement.

All members felt it was a positive learning experience and were optimistic for the future of Operator Services. The group expressed willingness to participate jointly in future projects. They felt strongly that the key to achieving success in the market is to provide the operators with multifunctional intelligent terminals to give the operators maximum revenue producing opportunities and the ability to serve the customer in the best possible manner. The JOINT Committee's report and research was used to make recommendations on future technology by a second task force called M.O.S.T. (Modernization of Operator Services Technology).

On the Management side they have someone from Methods, Human Resources and Engineering. On the CEP side they have three Union Executive representing both Operator Services Local 55 and Clerical Local 7. The mandate is to recommend the specific replacement technology vendor for the Directory Assistance System and to identify and recommend future service enhancements in Operator Services.

The management side of the project had never been involved in a Union / Management decision making project before, and by attending a Team Alignment Process for the project they're clearer on the project's mission and have saved themselves precious time by using this process.

**This project is the first one to use a large number of resources from outside of Operator Services. These departments are, for the first time, taking part in a Union Management project. It was difficult to get them on board at first. The majority of the managers could not accept the concept of a Union / Management project. They rolled their eyes at the thought of Operators being included in the responsibility to recommend a new data base and equipment. The fact that the dollar value of close to seventeen million total was entrusted to others that were not ENGINEERS, took their breath away!**

**Barry Gordon, the Vice President of Network Services and a Trustee from the beginning of this project, worked hard to reach those in command to ensure that all members of this committee would be taken seriously. In the past when new equipment was introduced the dollar value and not the Human factor was a consideration, the operators were viewed as an extension of the machine.**

**This is a "PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUTH IS PROJECT", ONE THAT TESTS THE REAL COMMITMENT ON BOTH SIDES OF THE FENCE.**

**A major consideration is the Human Resources issue; as the new technology will have an impact on Operator numbers and their job composition. We cannot stop technology, however with joint input we hope to make it a favorable and positive change.**

**M.O.S.T.'s goal is complete and the work stations and data base have been approved and will be in place in 94. Having had the Operators involved in the ergonomics, by listening to our customers through our Operators ears, MTS was unique in the move towards technology of the future. Phase two was where the importance of futuristic thinking was to become prime. It was in this phase that the revenue generating services would come into being. This was where the "dreams" were to be made into reality, where the jobs would change into revenue generating jobs. By listening to the Operators, MTS had hoped to put their finger on the pulse of it's customer and give them what they wanted at a price they are willing to pay.**

**MTS is a Crown Corporation. The Provincial Government is currently negotiating with a Boston based firm to out-source directory assistance. The Government's motivation for this deal is to attract new business to Manitoba while reducing MTS's employee complement as directed by the Public Utilities Board and reducing it's debt equity ratio. If this deal is finalized, Phase 2 will not occur and Operator Services and the MOST Project will be seriously impacted.**

**As we said earlier this project has been in place for six years and MTS has realized many Benefits from this initiative:**

**Workplace Safety and Health reports of shock like incidents have ceased:**

**Fewer than 10 reports in 1989**

**None from 1990 to today**

**Our Customer Satisfaction surveys show**

**Reduction of customer complaints**

**1989 to 1990 by 18%**

**1990 to 1991 by 24%.**

**1991 to 1992 by 30%**

**We have had a 40% increase in positive feedback from customers in 89 to 91 and 27% in 91 to 92. We have done job satisfaction surveys and those indicate improved satisfaction with the operators with the training received, the communication they are receiving and the information they receive as well as the belief that they have more freedom to act on their own and that the meaningfulness of their tasks have improved.**

**After hearing about the grievances we have received in the past, the resolution of grievances is certainly one of the benefits.**

**1985 to 1989**

**275 individual grievances**

**17 policy grievances**

**1 arbitration case**

**2 charges unfair labour practices**

**1990 to 1992**

**There is an average of 10 grievances per year. Now the Union Stewards and Managers are resolving grievances through problem solving at the initial step of the grievance process.**

**Casual Operator Absence has improved:**

**There was a reduction of 20% from 89 to 90**

**There was a further reduction of 10% in 90 to 91**

**We had a 30% reduction in 91 to 92.**

**This has been a major cost to MTS and created a Customer Service problem in the past.**

**Naturally, we find even today some 3 years after implementation, that there is still resistance to change. But there is commitment and strong leadership with both our organizations to continue and to intensify our efforts. Operators are gaining confidence to solve customer problems on their own, taking more ownership of the quality of the service they provide. An example of this is Gone With The Failures. There was a concern by management with the level of service failures we were receiving. These were mistakes that the operators made often and consistently. The managers had done all they could do to bring this problem to the attention of the Operators. In a last ditch attempt a manager walked through the office and randomly selected eight operators, sat them down and asked them for a solution to the problem. The result was that the operators came up with a series of video vignettes which were called "Gone With the Failures" It was a slap stick approach to some of the things they saw their fellow operators doing. This was presented at all of the**

Information Exchange meeting throughout the province and an improvement in customer service was a result of this project.

Operators are succeeding in taking on new responsibilities, such as the sales & promotion of MTS products and services related to our telecommunication network. They are gaining new and marketable skills, which helps them advance in their career at MTS.

At MTS, as we move towards the implementation of Continuous Quality Improvement processes and Work Simplification, Operator Services and the partnership we have formed with the Union in redesigning our systems and processes are cited as a model to the rest of the Corporation. A Joint Union Management Committee is steering this quality initiative. Because of our experience, we are better prepared to meet the new challenges of technological change and competition.

Operator Services has made a transition from a pilot to become part of the overall initiative by combining Jo-Anne's role as Project Coordinator with the new responsibilities of Quality Advisor. Jo-Anne is one of 11 Quality Advisors responsible for the roll out of Continuous Quality Improvement at MTS.

### **Benefits to the Union**

**\*\*Improved Working Conditions** - The office is less regimented. One operator said that she thought a prank had been played on her and somehow she had joined the army instead of the telephone company when she started working as an operator over 20 years ago. There is more freedom for the operators with the unlimited trades and the ability to provide better service by deviating from the written as well as unwritten practices. The changing role of the manager from a disciplinarian to a coach has affected the work environment.

Individuals members and union activists are learning new job skills. The opportunity to learn about personal computers, work on committees, and learn skills in other jobs that were once reserved for the elite have lead operators to be more successful in the job posting process.

**\*\*The elimination of remote monitoring** has lessened one of the stressors in the work place. I can remember being an operator and feeling panicked when the supervisor was sitting at that terminal because she might be listening to me. The spying and the sneak attack is gone.

**\*\*The relationship between labour and management has improved.** There are fewer grievances and more opportunity for consultation and discussion. There is a sense of satisfaction and achievement amongst operators and managers in working towards a win-win situation. I also see excitement at the Local Union level. Stewards aren't just dealing with grievances anymore. It can be depressing for Stewards when they are always involved in situations filled with conflict. Many are excited about committee work, the opportunity to learn about something new.

**\*\*Joint Participation** is common in Operator Services. The operators and the union have input to decisions and usually participate in making them. We have access to a considerable amount of information that was once considered top secret.

**\*\*The work place is more democratic.** We've had numerous experiences where the workers have suggested a change, tested the idea and have seen it become a reality. Individuals whose ideas that don't make it find out why not as opposed to hearing a killer phrase such as "it's not in the budget".

Moving from traditional adversarial roles is difficult, particularly for unions in today's hostile external environment. It takes courage and a tremendous leap of faith to agree to participate in a joint project such as this. We have come a long way in Operator Services and we do backslide at times. The positive changes that have occurred during the last five years reflect well on all the people who have worked so hard to make it a success. Today, operators have input into day to day decisions affecting their work. They are usually treated as sensible adults with opinions and feelings. MTS has discovered how talented and innovative operators are when given the opportunity to express their ideas.

I wish I could tell you that all our problems are solved and that Labour Relations between MTS and CEP are wonderful. While the relationships with our managers in Operator Services is good, overall Labour Relations between CEP and MTS are not as harmonious as we would wish.

We recently concluded negotiations with MTS and our involvement in this Project did not help us at the bargaining table. As restrictions are removed in Operator Services, other departments within MTS have more restrictions placed upon them than we ever had.

We recognize that change does not happen overnight, it is a slow process and a scary one. For change to occur, both parties must learn to trust each other. Industrial Relations and the three Unions and MTS are going through a Relationship By Objectives process and examining Mutual Gains Bargaining prior to the next round of negotiations.

**KEY STAKEHOLDERS** - Identifying and gaining the support of the Key Stakeholders was advice given to MTS in the very early stages of this project and we are glad that we followed it. We could have, however, done a better job with respect to the Regions or rural areas of MTS and with the Telecommunications Employees Association of Manitoba (TEAM) the union that represents management. From a union perspective, we could have done a better job with the rank and file.

**PACE** - There are some interesting observations about the pace of the change. For those taking a bird's eye view such as the Trustees or the Senior Executive of the company and the union, the change is not happening quickly enough. For those in the workplace who are directly affected by the change, it happens too quickly. While some say hurry up others tell us to slow down.

**FRONT LINE MANAGER** - I mentioned the resistance we experienced with the front line managers. We asked them to change the way they managed, asked them to do a somewhat different job than they had been hired to do. We provided education and coaching and many opportunities to initiate change. Some responded and excelled in the new role while others did not. The lesson is that not everyone will or can change and at some point, the decision has to be made to deal with managers who cannot operate in the new environment.

**FISH BOWL** - We conducted the Trial Change Project in one office. What we created was a fish bowl experiment. Those on the outside were staring in and pointing fingers and saying things such as "Did you see what was going on in there?" and "They can't do that!". The people in the Trial felt like they were constantly being observed and became very defensive when questioned about their activities. Our advice would be to avoid this situation if you can. It created friction, envy, mistrust and caused a division amongst the operators.

**RESOURCES** - This work reorganization project has put pressures on our resources. In resources, I include money, people, skills and time. This has not been cheap for MTS. Besides putting pressures on budgets, extra pressures have been put on people in the union and in management. We often commented that we were trying to reduce stress and in fact, we just substituted one type of stress with another.

We didn't have all of the skills and tools necessary in house. We hired external consultants and our corporate training department invested in new training packages for instructors and employees.

This project has put an extra workload on the union. Both the union staff and the elected officers have had to devote more time to meetings, discussions and caucuses on the Project.

**RISK** - Yes, there is risk involved in a change project. There's risk for the corporation, the union, as well as personal risk. If you do not succeed in improving quality or showing a monetary payback or achieving any other goal you may have, the corporation is at risk. We have seen many small successes in Operator Services, but we are not yet at a stage where we can definitely say we have made major improvements in the quality of service we provide.

I can certainly speak about personal risk. We are giraffes, we stuck our necks out. So far, none of us have been disciplined, demoted, fired and so on. As union officers, we have been re-elected. But managers in MTS have commented that they would not get involved, or be a champion in the project because of the career risk they perceived.

For those of you in the labour movement, the risk to the union is obvious. Take the MOST Committee for example. If the result is new technology that eliminates many jobs with no obvious benefits, our members will hold us to blame. Accountability in the labour movement could be as extreme as a de-certification vote. Not all of the membership



supports the union's involvement in a change project or a cooperative effort and the fingers often point at the union. In the labour movement, we feel much more comfortable when the fingers are pointed at the employer.

Delegates to our annual convention supported a resolution from our Local in 1989, and our union debated a policy document entitled Taking Charge of the Future, CWC's position on work reorganization in 1990 and reinforced our position in 1992 with a policy document entitled "Prosperity and Progress". We were fortunate to have a policy at the National level to guide us in this change project.

**COMMUNICATION** - Communication is a never ending challenge, a full time job in itself. There is no perfect medium and no magic solution. I have learned that people don't read the material distributed in the workplace, especially operators whose work seldom allows time for reading. Face to face discussions work better but are very time consuming. Even face to face creates problems. I have been misinterpreted and misquoted. At one point I wanted to finish the discussion by saying, "Now tell me what I just told you" to ensure the message was clear and understood.

People have short memories. We know that almost all of our operators received the Fast Forward To The Future document and attended a 2 hour meeting on company paid time. Today, many operators claim they never saw it, never heard of it and never attended a meeting.

Be creative, (I have put bulletins on the back of the toilet doors), be constant, develop a communication plan that seems excessive and stick to it.

Be clear and speak the language of the audience. We used the terminology Ground Rules at the beginning of a meeting and when no one offered any suggestions we realized that our audience had no idea what we meant.

Get immediate feedback. "Think about it and get back to us" doesn't work. The first thought that enters their mind is usually the most important piece of information.

We have a quote from Martin Luther King that summarizes our feelings about this Project we are involved in.

**We aren't what we oughta be,  
We aren't what we wanna be,  
We aren't what we're gonna be,  
But, thank God we ain't what we were.**