Quebec Labour and Management Experiences with Workplace Innovation

Background Document for Lessons Learned
on the Innovative Workplace

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1.0 OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION*

The economic upheaval of the 1980s, free trade, globalization increased competition, and the recession of the early 1990s, signaled the end of economic complacency for both employers and unions in Quebec. Against a backdrop of plant closures and serious competition problems, companies were forced to increase quality and lower costs. These dramatic changes forced labour and management to re-think the nature and extent of their relationship in the workplace.

This paper examines and summarizes recently published material on how and why these workplace innovations came about in Quebec, the impact they had on the province's economy and what the rest of Canada can learn from it. It also includes an examination of labour and management attitudes and motivations toward innovative practices and the reconciliation efforts required by both sides.

It cites and describes a number of recent innovative workplace experiences in several sectors of the Quebec economy.

Finally, this review tries to go beyond the economics involved and looks at the different approaches of labour, management and governments in dealing with industrial relations issues.

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* **Glossary of Acronyms**

CAMO	Comité d'adaptation de la main-d'oeuvre
CEP	Syndicat canadien des communications, de l'énergie et du papier
CIQ	Committee of Implementation of Quality
CSD	Centrale des syndicats démocratiques
CSN	Confédération des syndicats nationaux
FTQ	Fédération de travailleurs et des travailleuses du Québec
NFWO	New Form of Work Organization

We discover that instead of trying to ignore or deny the existence of conflict as part and parcel of labour-management relationships, the parties agree to accept it and to work together at trying to reconcile their divergent interests.

2.0 THE CONTEXT OF WORKPLACE INNOVATION IN QUEBEC

Coming out of the 1980s and in the early 1990s, employers realized that growth and profitability in the new environment could only be achieved through technological improvements, redesign of the production process, greater emphasis on human resources management and increased worker involvement in the well-being of the company. For management, workplace innovation is based on increased efficiency, productivity, quality, and profitability and lower costs. The road to achieve these results inevitably requires worker buy-in.

Successive recessions and persistent high unemployment rates had a sobering effect. As Clément Godbout, President of the Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec said: “Without a plant, there is no union, we have become more attentive to the problems of the industry”[1].

Lapointe and Paquet[2], in a survey of 114 local union officers in Quebec as to their attitudes towards new forms of work organization (NFWO), found a significant level of support and acceptance of workplace innovation, in particular for Total Quality Programs. Quality circles and semi-autonomous teams were not as highly supported.

Attitude of local union officers towards NFWO			
NFWO	**Defensive %**	**Critical %**	**Offensive %**
Job enrichment	17	52	31
Job rotation	26	32	48
Trades flexibility	33	40	27
Semi-autonomous teams	36	32	32
Quality circles	38	32	30
Total quality	16	42	42
Quality of work life	15	14	71

1 Le Devoir, May 1, 1992, Special section.

2 LAPOINTE, Paul-André et PAQUET, Renaud. " Syndicalisme et nouvelles formes d'organisation du travail : les positions des dirigeants syndicaux locaux ". Relations industrielles/Industrial Relations, vol. 49, no 2, 1994, 282-303.

Some analysts point out that since that survey, the level of support and acceptance of local union officers has grown significantly.

The study further notes that the three largest central labour organizations in Quebec, the CSD (in 1985[3] and 1988[4]) the CSN (in 1990[5] and 1991[6]) and the FTQ (in 1991[7] and 1993[8]), have all adopted policies clearly supporting workplace democratization and innovation. Such endorsement by all the Quebec central labour bodies, coupled with active education programs for union representatives and officers, is expected to lower any remaining opposition at the local level. Not only should local union officers react favourably to innovative workplace initiatives, but they are encouraged to take a pro-active role in promoting workplace democratization.

The CSN policy of promoting innovative practices in work organization calls for the following union approach:

1. Before engaging in joint activities with the employer, the union has to do its own financial and organizational analysis of the company and the participants have to receive adequate union training.

2. There must be clearly defined objectives and implementation mechanisms for improved plant operations and working conditions. These must be based on a consensus between labour and management, and financial and organizational transparency.

3. The main goal of the process is to protect and promote employment. Better organized companies are more productive, offer better quality products, are more competitive, which leads to the potential of increased employment.

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3 CENTRALE DES SYNDICATS DÉMOCRATIQUES. 1985. *Partenaires d'égal à égal : c'est un droit,* Montréal

4 CENTRALE DES SYNDICATS DÉMOCRATIQUES. 1988. D''égal à égal dans les décisions, un défi au syndicalisme, Montréal

5 CONFÉDÉRATION DES SYNDICATS NATIONAUX. 1990. Procès-verbal du 55e Congrès de la CSN, 5 au 11 mai 1990. Montreal

6 CONFÉDÉRATION DES SYNDICATS NATIONAUX. 1991. *Prendre les devants dans l'organisation du travail.* Montreal

7 FÉDÉRATION DES TRAVAILLEURS ET DES TRAVAILLEUSES DU QUÉBEC. 1991. *Pour un Québec des Solidarités.* Montréal

8 FÉDÉRATION DES TRAVAILLEURS ET DES TRAVAILLEUSES DU QUÉBEC. 1993. *Face aux changements. De nouvelles solidarités.* Montréal

4. Establish trust. Keep the process away from collective bargaining. Temporary agreements or Letters of Understanding should be used to modify some contractual restrictive practices. Keeping the collective agreement intact (status quo) offers an incentive to convince management to settle differences amicably.

5. There needs to be joint labour-management analysis of the situation of the company and discussion of global orientations.

6. The parties should establish a joint steering committee to oversee the changes.

7. Various ad hoc and permanent joint committees to study issues and problems and make recommendations may also be required.

8. The process should be continuous.

The CSN approach goes beyond collaboration in a reactive sense in order to save a plant and protect jobs. It encourages a proactive process in order to gain more power from employers and acquire new rights for workers.

In the early 1990s, the FTQ also adopted a positive attitude towards workplace innovation although in a less proactive manner. In their approach, the overwhelming reason for participation was protection of jobs. The structure of the FTQ, a central labour body with numerous independent affiliated unions, does not easily lend itself to a more proactive role. Therefore, the FTQ opted to generally support workplace change, as well as to institute union education programs to better equip union representatives with the knowledge and tools for participating in innovative ventures. As the education process worked its way through, most FTQ affiliated unions have embraced joint labour-management innovative practices in the workplace.

The CSD, whose creation was linked directly to a less dogmatic and confrontational type of trade unionism and a greater willingness to participate joint initiatives, has supported innovative workplace practices since the early 1980s.

Although employers seem to have agreed to relinquish some management control in order to gain worker buy-in and unions have embraced the innovative workplace practices in order to save jobs, both parties need to develop mutual trust if the exercise is to be successful. Harrisson[9], in a study of the development

9 HARRISSON, Denis et Normand LAPLANTE, "Confiance, coopération et partenariat: un processus de transformation dans l'entreprise québécoise", *Relations industrielles, Numéro thématique Syndicats et restructuration économique*, vol. 49, no. 4, 1994, pp. 637-670.

of new types of interaction between the parties in four Quebec manufacturing establishments, observed, at the local level, a transformation in the relationship between management and the union. In the four cases studied, trust was built with the aid of joint labour-management committees, equipped with all the relevant information, developing a true partnership and focused on implementing changes benefitting both parties.

The establishment of mutual trust and acceptance is somewhat easier to achieve in Quebec. There is a long history of business, labour and management meeting throughout the years at various economic summits. Labour enjoys a legitimacy in Quebec that is absent in other provinces. Under the old system of decrees governing salaries and working conditions in the various economic sectors, both labour and management had to work jointly on “comités paritaires”. Consequently, Quebec employers and unions have a long history of mutual recognition.

3.0 NEW APPROACHES IN LABOUR RELATIONS

The major characteristic underlying most innovative workplace or industrial relations practices is a quest for increased flexibility and capacity to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. Des Trois Maisons (1994)[10] identifies five areas of flexibility along with examples of negotiated arrangements worthy of special mention.

a) *Technological flexibility*: This is the capacity of the parties to balance the requirement for major investments in technological change with the capacity to protect jobs. For example, **Goodyear Canada and CEP Local 143, FTQ**, negotiated a clause where the employer agrees to use an attrition philosophy to prevent job losses resulting from technological change or productivity improvements. The company further agrees to keep the displaced workers at work with a maximum limit of 1% of the labour force required to maintain the production levels. The **Société Alcan (Arvida) and the Syndicat national des employés de l'Aluminium d'Arvida** reached an agreement calling for the employer to advise the union as soon as technological, organizational or work practice changes are contemplated. This notice has to be given to a joint committee on changes (2 labour, 2 management) along with the implementation plan for the proposed changes. This committee can create ad hoc committees to study the files of affected employees, interview them and make recommendations on the modalities of the implementation of the changes.

b) *Skills flexibility:* This is the capacity of organizations to provide adequate training and skills upgrading to respond to a changing work environment. For example **Abitibi Price and the Syndicat national des travailleurs des pâtes et papiers d'Alma (CSN)** agreed to a joint committee on human resources development that decides on training priorities. Joint financing of training is achieved through an employee contribution of 35% of the revenue generated by the gain-sharing program matched by an equal employer contribution to supplement the normal training budget. There are provisions for individual financial assistance to employees willing to upgrade their skills, and for sabbatical leave. As well, there is a commitment to continuous learning.

10 DES TROIS MAISONS, Jean. Les nouvelles approches en relations du travail. *Le Marché du Travail.* August 1994, p.6

c) *Structural flexibility:* This is the capacity to achieve worker involvement in organizational change. For example, **Domtar (Donnacona) and the Syndicat national des travailleurs des pâtes et papiers de Donnacona (CSN)** reached an agreement on work reorganization where employees will work in teams and will perform routine adjustments and maintenance of the equipment. Following adequate training these teams will perform some management duties such as inventory control, replacement of absent workers, receiving of chemicals, tracking and reordering of materials and improvement of the job rotation system.

d) *Work practices flexibility:* This is the capacity to escape the rigidities of collective agreements in terms of classifications and capacity to achieve multi-skilling. For example, the agreement between **Gec Alsthom électromécanique Inc. and the Syndicat des travailleurs de Gec Alsthom électromécanique (CSN)** calls for the folding of 35 different classifications into 14 task families. Each of these families are multi-skilled. Remuneration becomes knowledge and skills-based. The hours of work have been harmonized and the equipment runs continuously without stopping for coffee breaks or meals.

e) *Labour relations flexibility:* This is the capacity of both parties to develop mutual trust and participative management. For example, the agreement between **Aciers inoxydables Atlas and le Syndicat des employés des Aciers inoxydables Atlas (CSN)** calls for a joint committee on industrial relations to be a flexible mechanism to facilitate the adjustments required by workplace change. They meet once a month or more often if required, they can amend the collective agreement by mutual consent. The employer has to disclose all pertinent information to the work of the committee. The agreement between **Les forges de Sorel and the Syndicat des aciers forgés de Sorel (CSN)** addresses the question of disclosure and transparency by the signing of a confidentiality agreement between management and the union. The company agrees to give to the union, on a monthly basis, the financial statement, the results of the operations, changes in the accounts and the financial comments on the operating results. The union has the right to hire its own accountant to check the employer's books. Finally, the agreement between the **Société J.M. Asbestos and the Syndicat national de l'amiante d'Asbestos (CSD)** calls for a Board of Directors of the company composed of 3 members from the Asbestos-Estrie Mining Group, 3 members from the workers' cooperative and 3 members chosen by these two groups. The workers' cooperative can acquire up to 75% of the shares held by the Asbestos-Estrie Mining Group if there is no new expansion plan.

In a study of the emergence of atypical collective agreement arrangements in Quebec, Rondeau (1993)[11] describes several cases of continuous bargaining agreements. The apparition of these agreements appears to be linked to the nature of economic and technological changes requiring flexibility and quick adaptation in an atmosphere of participative management.[12] Some characteristics of these agreements include expiration dates beyond the usual three year term (4 to 9 years), final offer arbitration for wages, some form of employment security, amendment of non-monetary clause by joint committee, joint labour-management committees, information sharing and transparency, some work organization initiative (teams, total quality, multi-skilling, etc.), as well as joint management of training. All these agreements trade long term labour peace and union involvement in exchange for some employment security and increased participation in the management of the enterprise. Although most of these agreements were negotiated in times of great economic duress and were meant to avoid the usual concession bargaining pattern, they significantly increased the involvement of labour in the restructuring effort.

11 RONDEAU, Claude. " La négociation continue. Étude théorique et pratique québécoise ". Actes du XXXe congrès de l'Association canadienne de relations industrielles. E. Déom et A.E. Smith, dir. Québec : ACRI/CIRA, 1993, 225-239.

12 The agreements analyzed are: Aciers inoxydables Atlas and le Syndicat des employés des Aciers inoxydables Atlas (CSN), MIL-Davie Inc and the Syndicat des travailleurs du chantier naval de Lauzon (CSN), Soreflex International and the Syndicat des travailleurs de Soreflex (CSN), La Corporation des Tapis Peerless and the Travailleurs Amalgamés du Vêtement et du Textile (FTQ), Abitibi Price and the Syndicat national des travailleurs des pâtes et papiers d'Alma (CSN), Goodyear Canada and CEP Local 143, FTQ, Sidbec-Dosco and the United Steelworkers of America (FTQ) and Bermatex and the Syndicat du textile de Montmagny (CSD).

4.0 CASES OF WORKPLACE INNOVATIVE EXPERIENCES

The literature review uncovered several documented cases of innovative workplace experiences. While most of these cases are extensively described in various publications and articles, some are only mentioned as examples of a specific workplace or industrial relation innovative practice. The reported cases occur in a wide variety of industrial sectors and, for the most part, in unionized environments.

Summaries of the major features of each documented case, where possible, have been provided according to the following four broad elements: 1) the external factors that led to the decision to innovate; 2) the nature of the workplace innovations; 3) the process used to implement the innovative practices; and 4) the workplace innovation outcomes.

4.1 Aciers inoxidables Atlas and Syndicat des employés des Aciers Atlas (CSN)[13]

a) *External factors*: In the late 1980s, Rio Algom decided to sell the plant located in Tracy, Quebec. The plant, in need of modernization and new equipment, was losing ground in an increasingly competitive environment. In order to attract Sammi, a Korean company willing to buy the plant and invest in its modernization, the Quebec Minister of Industry, Trade, Science and Technology proposed a tripartite "social contract" guaranteeing new investments in exchange for industrial peace.

b) *Nature of innovation*: In order to secure $300 million dollars of investments to modernize the plant and generate some 300 jobs, the tripartite "social contact" called for six years of industrial peace, an employment floor, final offer arbitration for monetary contract clauses, the creation of a labour-management committee on industrial relations to facilitate the required adjustments to the changes, the creation of a plan for human resources

13 BOURQUE, Reynald and Nathalie DUGAS, Les nouvelles pratiques en milieu de travail : regard sur les démarches dans le secteur manufacturier. *Le Marché du travail,* 16, no 9, September 1995, p.10

development and the implementation of a Total Quality program. In 1993, the parties negotiated a gain-sharing plan.

c) *Implementation process*: Although the decision-making authority on the nature and the mechanisms of change rests with management, more discussions and consultations take place prior to implementation. Three committees oversee the process: a labour-management committee on industrial relations composed of six members with equal representation to oversee the changes resulting from the proposed investments; a human resources development joint committee of five management and five union representatives to identify the training requirements and deliver the programs; and a committee of five management and four union representatives to implement the Total Quality program. In addition quarterly meetings are held with the company president and all the employee groups.

d) *Innovation outcomes*: Although the promised major modernization investments keep being postponed, both parties agree that the process has resulted in increased communications, transparency and a better exchange of information. Training, especially related to the Total Quality initiative, has significantly increased. Both parties agree that the industrial relations climate, historically very confrontational, has changed significantly towards increased cooperation. Conflict resolution is now handled through discussion and "interest based bargaining" and grievances are handled more quickly. There has been a significant increase in the use of Letters of Understanding to formalize the changes. Employment increased from 411 in 1991 to 440 in 1995. Quality and labour productivity have increased, production time has decreased. Total production went from 60,000 tons in 1991 to 95,000 tons in 1995. The company had profits of $20 million in 1994 and payments to the employees under the gain-sharing plan are expected.

4.2 Câble Alcan (Saint Maurice) and Syndicat des travailleurs de l'Alcan de la Mauricie (CSN)[14]

a) *External factors*: The announcement in 1990 of the closure of the soldering wire department (layoff of 40 workers) had a major impact on the parties. Fear of a total plant closure coupled with a desire to improve long-term competitiveness were the driving factors. Management originated the changes with conditional support from the union.

b) *Nature of innovation*: Innovations included continuous quality improvement program, work reorganization designed to flatten the hierarchical structure, implementation of a just-in-time production process, the creation of autonomous work teams, job standardization, job enrichment and job rotation.

c) *Implementation process*: Management invited the President of the union to meet with the consultants that had prepared a detailed plan of work reorganization and continuous quality improvement program. At first, the local union felt that this initiative was designed to get rid of the union. Following consultations and union training sessions organized by the research services of the CSN, the local union's fears were alleviated and it decided to propose its own plan for work reorganization. The main condition for full union involvement in the process included full economic transparency from Alcan, union participation on the steering committee, consensus decision-making, the right to information and training, the respect of union rules, the application of the collective agreement and the signature of a Letter of Understanding based on the union proposal. Following negotiations, an agreement was reached but not signed. A joint steering committee oversees the process and oversees the activities of quality improvement teams. Communications increased with weekly management-union meetings and publication of a newspaper. All employees got problem-solving training and specific job training was enhanced. The whole process came to a halt following the amalgamation of the workforce with another plant in late 1993. In 1994, a labour relations committee (management group and five union representatives) started

[14] JULIEN, Carole. Les nouvelles pratiques en milieu de travail : regard sur les démarches dans le secteur manufacturier. *Le Marché du travail,* 16, no 9, September 1995, p.97

meeting on a weekly basis to try to revive the initiative, but mutual trust had been lost and the attempt failed.

d) *Innovation outcomes*: During the period of cooperation, product quality increased, the production cycle was shortened, and labour productivity increased. Although the parties agree that the labour relations climate was better and the resolution of disputes was more easily achieved up to 1993, they are now back to a more confrontational approach.

4.3 Les Forges de Sorel and Syndicat des aciers forgés Sorel (CSN)[15]

a) *External factors*: Prior to the 1990 round of negotiations, the company informed the union that significant concessions were required to save the plant. The local management had no credibility with the union. The Toronto head office fired the plant manager as well as approximately 30 managers and supervisors. The union asked for the creation of a labour force adjustment committee (Comité d'adaptation de la main-d'oeuvre (CAMO)). This committee allowed the parties to meet, develop mutual trust, and proceed with further joint initiatives.

b) *Nature of innovation*: These included a total quality program, flattened hierarchical structure, complete financial information disclosure, and gain-sharing.

c) *Implementation process*: Through the CAMO, the parties hired a consultant to diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of the company. The report stressed the necessity of improving the technical aspect of the operations as well as the working relationship between managers and workers. Trust was further increased when the company agreed to share with the union, on an ongoing basis, all the financial information regarding the operation. A massive layoff was also avoided through a work-sharing program that lasted 39 weeks in 1992, helping convince workers of the merits of a cooperative approach. A total quality program was then instituted. A joint 10 member steering committee was established as well as departmental committees and quality improvement teams. Problem-solving training was given to all

15 MASCHINO, Dalil. Les nouvelles pratiques en milieu de travail : regard sur les démarches dans le secteur manufacturier. *Le Marché du travail,* 16, no 9, September 1995, p.103

workers, supervisors and managers. Additional training was given to supervisors whose role was drastically changing. The mass firing of managers and supervisors prior to the start of the process considerably flatted the hierarchical structure. Most of the changes have been handled through Letters of Understanding outside of the collective agreement. A gain-sharing plan was negotiated in 1994.

d) *Innovation outcomes*: Significant improvement of several productivity and quality indicators. Monthly losses of $200,000 at the beginning of the process have been replaced with a return to profitability in 1992. Employment was stable for the first few years and increased significantly during the last 12 months. Results enabled management to proceed with investments in machinery required for the long term viability of the plant. The harmonious labour relations climate and the increased participation of workers and the union improved the quality of work life.

4.4 Goodyear (Valleyfield) - Syndicat canadien des communications, de l'énergie et du papier (FTQ)[16]

a) *External factors*: This major tire manufacturing plant had made massive layoffs. There was a significant risk of plant closure. Major investments were required in order to save the plant. The Quebec government as a condition of injecting funds in the project required the signature of a social contract between the parties.

b) *Nature of innovation*: The terms of the social contract call for participative management, quality improvement process and continuous bargaining.

c) *Implementation process*: The union approached the provincial government for assistance in order to save the plant. As a condition to an $800,000 interest-free loan, the government required a social contract to improve labour relations, the plant performance and quality of the product. After lengthy negotiations, a social contract was signed. Various joint committees were established, the employer's books are now totally open and virtually all aspects of the operations of the plant are under joint management. Training

16 FÉDÉRATION DES TRAVAILLEURS ET DES TRAVAILLEUSES DU QUÉBEC. 1993. *Face aux changements. De nouvelles solidarités.* Montréal

and communications are improved. The collective agreement is open, with conciliation of monetary issues and employment guarantees.

d) *Innovation outcomes*: There was an increase in productivity and product quality. The labour relations climate improved significantly.

4.5 General Electric (Bromont) - no union[17]

a) *External factors*: In the early 1980s, under the leadership of the CEO, Jack Welch, this U.S. multinational corporation decided to build a new plant in Quebec. The G.E. head office made a specific decision to use this new plant as a testing ground for the sociotech model. The plant produces parts for a GE jet engine used mainly in military airplanes. Employment peaked at 650 in 1989 and decreased to 275 in 1994 due to the collapse in demand for military aircraft.

b) *Nature of innovation*: A sociotech plant organization is based on the concept that a successful and productive enterprise depends on its social system (labour skills, work organization...) as much as its technical system (machinery, production processes...). The Bromont plant operates under nine sociotechical principles :

1. All members of the organization are honest, responsible, motivated and flexible.

2. The group has the responsibility, for the most part, to plan its own action.

3. Multitasking and all the required skills are managed by the group.

4. The group is responsible to manage its needs, its development, its work, its conflicts and its relations to other groups.

5. Information is provided where it influences the action.

17 MORISSETTE, Réal. Les nouvelles pratiques en milieu de travail : regard sur les démarches dans le secteur manufacturier. *Le Marché du travail,* 16, no 9, September 1995, p.108

6. The outcome is what is important, the methods used to reach it can vary.

7. The support structures must above all reinforce the behaviors that emphasize responsibility, initiative and collaboration.

8. The group has jurisdiction over the machinery, the information and the tools required to accomplish its duties.

9. The organizational rules are continuously reviewed to adapt to the needs and to the changes.

In addition they implemented skills-based remuneration and a gain-sharing plan.

c) *Implementation process*: Management and consultants spent a year and a half prior to the opening of the plant to conceptualize the work organization. The system is based on decentralization and participation. Several types of autonomous work teams and various committees are responsible for the operations of the plant. For example the responsibilities of a production team would include: work assignments, quality control and improvement, work scheduling, training needs assessment, management of training and multi-skilling process, and preventive maintenance. In addition to the elaborate team and committee structure, communications are enhanced through a plant-wide television and electronic posting system. The multi-skilling process for each production team involves job rotation and training over a 40 month period. Every new worker is trained in active listening techniques. Remuneration is skills-based (based on the level of multi-skilling achieved) and augmented by a gain-sharing program.

d) *Innovation outcomes*: Production teams constantly assume increased responsibilities. They have achieved an almost totally paperless environment and a continuous improvement of productivity and quality, reduction of down-time and of the production cycle. They have a very low defect rate. Employee satisfaction indicators are high, with very little turnover and very low absenteeism. The gain-sharing plan generated some $2,500 per employee last year. Recent layoffs have seriously affected the long-term security and confidence of the employees.

4.6 Lauralco Quebec Inc. (Deschambault) - no union[18]

a) *External factors*: Lauralco, a subsidiary of US-based Alumax, decided to open a new aluminum plant as a result of very competitive electricity rates from Hydro-Quebec and of open access to the US market. Most of the production of aluminum ingots is exported to the US. There are strong competitive pressures from Russia. The plant opened in 1992 with more than 500 employees.

b) *Nature of innovation*: From the beginning, management opted for a organizational structure conducive to high worker participation and to continuous quality and productivity improvement. The main features include work teams with increased responsibility , a very flat hierarchical structure, regular and effective communications between the various levels, continuous training, skills-based remuneration.

c) *Implementation process*: Workers for this plant were carefully selected. Of the 18,000 applications, 5,000 workers were interviewed for the 550 jobs. The ability to work in teams, to show initiative and to work in a continuous improvement environment were determining hiring criteria. Initial training dealt with operational technical issues, team-work, problem-solving and statistical control. The continuous training program deals with multi-skilling, preventive maintenance, health and safety and the environment. Teams have to spend from 5% to 7% of worktime on training activities. The plant operates with a 15% surplus of employees to facilitate training and participation on the various plant committees. Teams, when fully operational, should deal with scheduling, vacations, overtime allocation, purchasing, team member evaluation and health and safety prevention. There are 2 salary levels for production workers, $43,000 per year for operators and $48,000 for mechanics-electricians. These levels are reached after 2 ½ years based on the responsibilities assumed by the teams and the increase in multi-skilling.

d) *Innovation outcomes*: The process is still being implemented and developed. Specific outcomes have not been identified.

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18 MASCHINO, Dalil. Les nouvelles pratiques en milieu de travail : regard sur les démarches dans le secteur manufacturier. *Le Marché du travail,* 16, no 9, September 1995, p.112

4.7 BPCO (Pont-Rouge) - Centrale des syndicats démocratiques (CSD)[19]

a) *External factors*: The plant was established in 1904 and employs some 200 employees in the production of wood fiber-based construction materials. In the late 1980, the need to maintain competitiveness, the anticipated introduction of new equipment and the need to improve labour relations within the plant were the determining factors motivating management and the union to jointly initiate the process.

b) *Nature of innovation*: Both management and the union collaborated to implement a system of participative management, to create autonomous teams, and to establish a continuous quality improvement program.

c) *Implementation process*: Following two sets of bitter negotiations, both parties agreed that a radical change was required. An adjustment committee (CAMO) was created and diagnosed several shortcomings in training, communications and logistics. Consultants were used to develop a human resource development plan. A joint labour-management steering committee was to oversee changes in the workplace. At first the focus was introduction of new technology. A Committee of Implementation of Quality (CIQ) was created to oversee the management of the continuous quality improvement program. All the committees, from the steering committee to departmental implementation committees have equal labour and management representation. Communications were improved and training programs jointly developed and implemented.

d) *Innovation outcomes*: Labour-management relations are more harmonious although there has not been any significant change in the number of disciplinary sanctions, grievances or labour turnover. Volume of production has not changed but quality has greatly improved.

19 FLEURY, Gilles. Les nouvelles pratiques en milieu de travail : regard sur les démarches dans le secteur manufacturier. *Le Marché du travail,* 16, no 10, October 1995, p.9

4.8 Papiers Perkins (Laval) - Syndicat des employés des Papiers Perkins (CSN)[20]

a) *External factors*: This plant produces toilet paper and paper towels and employs some 150 employees. There is increased competition from US firms that are taking an increasing larger share of the market. Thus the need to maintain competitiveness and to improve a difficult climate of labour relations were motivating factors.

b) *Nature of innovation*: Following a major training exercise, the parties implemented a quality control program as well as started a trend towards semi-autonomous teams.

c) *Implementation process*: Following a in house survey of training needs and through collaborative efforts with a local CEGEP, training program were implemented for all employees. This training effort modified the attitudes of employees towards change and employee involvement. Trust having been established between the parties, team work was introduced through pilot projects for production employees. In shipping, the firing of the supervisor coupled with the decision not to replace him, precipitated the creation of a semi-autonomous work team.

d) *Innovation outcomes*: The changes led to improved product quality and increased productivity (23.4% increase in the last 2 years). Labour relations were also improved with fewer grievances and reduced absenteeism.

20 TURCOT, Yves. Les nouvelles pratiques en milieu de travail : regard sur les démarches dans le secteur manufacturier. *Le Marché du travail,* 16, no 10, October 1995, p.85

4.9 Papiers Scott (Crabtree) - CSN[21]

a) *External factors*: The plant established in 1930, employs some 650 employees in the production of toilet and tissue paper. The head office as well as some of the senior management are located in Vancouver. Following directives from corporate head office to substantially reduce operating costs, the union, having already decided to bring work organization issues to the forefront, approached management to insist that it wanted to be a full partner in the upcoming restructuring/rationalization process.

b) *Nature of innovation*: The Union has taken an active role and is involved in the restructuring process

c) *Implementation process*: Both parties signed a Letter of Understanding on union involvement and work organization. They established a joint labour-management steering committee and hired a consultant to assess the priorities. The parties are now in the process of agreeing on joint action. The next steps involve communications, training, changes in tasks as well as the creation of work teams.

d) *Innovation outcomes*: Even if the restructuring effort is in its infancy, the parties already witnesses increased productivity (6%) and quality coupled with a substantial decrease in production costs.

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[21] BOURQUE, Reynald and Nathalie DUGAS. Les nouvelles pratiques en milieu de travail : regard sur les démarches dans le secteur manufacturier. *Le Marché du travail,* 16, no 10, October 1995, p.86

4.10 Produits forestiers Alliance Inc. (Donnacona), Fédération du papier et de la forêt (CSN)[22]

a) *External factors*: Following the announcement of layoffs at this pulp and paper mill employing some 400 employees and the threat of closure, the union requested to effect global changes to maintain the company's competitiveness. The company president, on his side, asked the parties to work together to find solutions to improve the viability of the plant.

b) N*ature of innovation*: The parties engaged in participative management. They jointly developed a restructuring plan, a modernization plan and a strategy to finance the changes. They worked to introduce a quality program, just-in-time production, semi-autonomous teams and job rotation. They are now discussing the creation of a gain-sharing program.

c) *Implementation process*: Six joint labour-management committees oversee the participative management process. The Policy Committee develops the guidelines and policies on the business and strategic plans, the continuous quality improvement program, the flexibility in work organization, labour relations harmonization, health and safety, training and communications. The policies and guidelines are general in nature and are reached by consensus. An executive committee is mandated to implement the policies. A committee to implement the continuous quality improvement program and to achieve world class standards (ISO). Joint communications, training and health and safety committees complete the structure

d) *Innovation outcomes*: So far, success can be measured by improved product quality and increased productivity, increased production (460 to 486 tons per day in June 1994), improved labour relations, fewer grievances, reduced absenteeism and employee turnover.

22 JULIEN, Carole. Les nouvelles pratiques en milieu de travail : regard sur les démarches dans le secteur manufacturier. *Le Marché du travail,* 16, no 10, October 1995, p.90

4.11 CAMCO Inc. (Montreal) - CEP (FTQ)[23]

a) *External factors*: This major appliance manufacturing plant owned by General Electric employed some 900 workers in 1994 (1200 in 1989). In order to maintain competitiveness and control costs, three waves of innovation were implemented, each one being preceded by management personnel changes.

b) *Nature of innovation*: The three successive waves of innovative initiatives were : quality circles, semi-autonomous teams, continuous improvement

c) *Implementation process*: In a first phase, mainly driven by management with the union taking a neutral role, quality circles were introduced on a voluntary basis. In the late 80s, this initiative became a model of its kind with approximately 30 active groups and some 300 workers participating on a voluntary basis. New management then developed a project to implement semi-autonomous teams and to change the internal structure of the plant by creating 3 internal enterprises. Outside consultants were hired and negotiations were started with the union. Layoffs, three management changes in 18 months and one change at the union level brought this process to a halt. In 1992, following significant layoffs and amid rumors of plant closure, an adjustment committee (CAMO) was formed. Following studies commissioned by the committee, a continuous quality and productivity improvement program was recommended and a consultant was hired to coordinate the reorganization process. A joint steering committee was created as well as four working groups.

d) *Innovation outcomes*: So far, the parties report that a participatory culture was implemented and that the labour relations climate is greatly improved.

23 MORISSETTE, Réal. Les nouvelles pratiques en milieu de travail : regard sur les démarches dans le secteur manufacturier. *Le Marché du travail,* 16, no 11, November 1995, p.9

4.12 Frigidaire Canada Ltéé. (L'Assomption) and Locals 1148 and 2753, International Association of Machinists (FTQ)[24]

a) *External factors*: This major appliance manufacturer reorganized its production and moved the refrigerator production to another location, cutting total production from 500,000 to 312,000 units and employment from 1,200 to 655. The competitive situation of the plant, the risk of plant closure and finally a decision to introduce new equipment all contributed to discussions between the parties for new approaches.

b) *Nature of innovation*: The parties implemented a system of work teams or cells having a greater degree of responsibility.

c) *Implementation process*: Management chose and hired a consultant. Four consecutive phases were implemented: information and awareness, elimination of one layer of supervision, creation of work teams or cells and finally the empowerment of employees. Three joint committees are in place: a steering committee, an adjustment committee (CAMO) and an implementation cell.

d) *Innovation outcomes*: Parties feel that it is still too soon to assess but noticeable improvement has been seen in labour relations, with fewer disciplinary sanctions and more employee involvement.

24 TURCOT, Yves. Les nouvelles pratiques en milieu de travail : regard sur les démarches dans le secteur manufacturier. *Le Marché du travail,* 16, no 11, November 1995, p.70

4.13 Inglis Ltée. (Montmagny) and Centrale des syndicats démocratiques (CSD)[25]

a) *External factors*: Free trade and the opening of the US market led the head office of this large appliance manufacturer to make significant investments, helped in part by federal and provincial government interest-free loans, designed to redesign the products, change the production process and change the organization of work.

b) *Nature of innovation*: The process called for increased autonomy for maintenance, engineering and quality control employees, the establishment of a job evaluation system, French and mathematics skills upgrading, social training and the abolition of piece work remuneration.

c) *Implementation process*: Following a meeting of the company president with all the employees where the investments and the changes were announced, two joint labour-management committees were initially created. The first one, composed the plant management, representatives from the CSD and the local union executive was mandated to come up with a working environment and a training proposal to facilitate the implementation of autonomous work teams. The second one, composed of the plant manager, a representative from Inglis, a CSD and a local union representative was mandated to analyze and disseminate the decisions of the first committee. Both committees had their own consultants. Eventually these committees were succeeded by a 22 member joint steering committee and a joint implementation committee.

d) *Innovation outcomes*: Increased demand for the product meant a greater emphasis on equipment improvement than on work reorganization. The change in the remuneration system with the abolition of piece work improved the motivation of employees to participate in changes in work organization.

4.15 Crane Canada Inc. (Montreal) - Union internationale du

25 COURCHESNE, Réjean. Les nouvelles pratiques en milieu de travail : regard sur les démarches dans le secteur manufacturier. *Le Marché du travail,* 16, no 11, November 1995, p.72

verre, mouleurs, poterie et autres (FTQ)[26]

a) *External factors*: This porcelain bathroom fixture manufacturing plant is a subsidiary of a US-based company and employs some 200 workers. The poor economic performance of the plant coupled with the increasingly competitive environment gave rise to the threat of a plant closure.

b) *Nature of innovation*: In answer to this threat, the parties began a process of dialogue on quality, of more cooperative management and of continuous improvement.

c) *Implementation process*: Basically the change was effected through the creation of a joint steering committee on quality improvement and a focus on increased training especially in the areas of problem solving techniques..

d) *Innovation outcomes*: Overall, the parties report a better labour-management climate, daily production increases from 4.6 et 5.7 units per day, the quality index increases from 75% to 86,7% and the defect rate falls from 25% to 13.3%.

4.16 Shell Canada. (Montreal-East refinery) - Travailleurs unis du pétrole du Canada (FTQ)[27]

a) *External factors*: This major oil refinery in east end Montreal, employing some 430 workers, was experiencing serious economic problems, had to find ways to maintain competitiveness. There was a possibility of a plant closure.

b) *Nature of innovation*: A system of job rotation and teamwork was instituted.

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26 TURCOT, Yves. Les nouvelles pratiques en milieu de travail : regard sur les démarches dans le secteur manufacturier. *Le Marché du travail,* 16, no 11, November 1995, p.77

27 BOURQUE, Reynald and Murielle LABERGE. Les nouvelles pratiques en milieu de travail : regard sur les démarches dans le secteur manufacturier. *Le Marché du travail,* 16, no 11, November 1995, p.79

c) *Implementation process*: The process was accomplished by the creation of a joint steering committee on organizational efficiency and of the various ad hoc joint committees required to implement teamwork, job rotation and enrichment. Special emphasis was directed at improving communication mechanisms and increasing transparency. Extensive training programs were implemented to develop problem-solving skills.

d) *Innovation outcomes*: The changes resulted in a better labour-management climate, fewer disciplinary actions and grievances and reduced absenteeism. The plant also experienced increased production, quality and productivity.

4.17 Christie Brown. (Montreal) - Syndicat international des travailleurs et des travailleuses de la boulangerie, confiserie et du tabac (FTQ) and Association internationale des machinistes (FTQ)[28]

a) *External factors*: This cookie and biscuit manufacturing plant employs some 600 workers in Montreal. The need for change was prompted by a $60 million investment for new equipment.

b) *Nature of innovation*: The company introduced semi-autonomous work teams in the new section of the plant.

c) *Implementation process*: The union remained on the sidelines and was somewhat cautious about the project. The teams had some difficulty getting underway. Consultants were hired to select and train the employees for the new section. This group of employees have considerable autonomy and responsibility and they receive substantial training. They also receive $0.50 more per hour than employees in the old section.

d) *Innovation outcomes*: Although there has been a 50% increase in productivity, the plant experienced increased tensions between employees of the new section and those in the old plant. In general there was an increase the number of grievances and a deterioration of the industrial relations climate.

4.18 Econogros, Division of Metro-Richelieu - Travailleurs unis

28 COMTOIS, Paul. Les nouvelles pratiques en milieu de travail : regard sur les démarches dans le secteur manufacturier. *Le Marché du travail,* 16, no 12, December 1995, p.10

de l'alimentation et du commerce (FTQ)[29]

a) *External factors*: This food distribution company employing some 135 workers was continuously losing money and a threat of plant closure was real if the company could not turn the situation around.

b) *Nature of innovation*: The company was seeking employee involvement in finding solutions to production problems.

c) *Implementation process*: At the initiative of management an adjustment committee (CAMO) was established and a joint steering committee created. In addition there are six employee committees under the direction of a consultant to seek solutions to operational problems in various departments and to make recommendations.

d) *Innovation outcomes*: So far the parties noticed an improvement in the labour-management climate, reduced overtime, improved communications and a mutual understanding.

4.19 Weston Bakeries (Longueuil) - Syndicat des employés de la boulangerie Weston (CSD)[30]

a) *External factors*: In the late 1980, this major Montreal bakery employing some 300 workers was faced with the decision to transfer all its production in another province or to build a brand new plant. They decided to close the old plant and open a state-of-the art new facility.

b) *Nature of innovation*: The new plant required a total change in production process, technology and work organization. There was also a need for a change of organizational culture.

c) *Implementation process*: Since union representatives felt they lacked information on the changes, an adjustment committee (CAMO) was created

29 TURCOT, Yves. Les nouvelles pratiques en milieu de travail : regard sur les démarches dans le secteur manufacturier. *Le Marché du travail,* 16, no 12, December 1995, p.85

30 TURCOT, Yves. Les nouvelles pratiques en milieu de travail : regard sur les démarches dans le secteur manufacturier. *Le Marché du travail,* 16, no 12, December 1995, p.86

to facilitate communications and participation between the parties. An employee literacy program was instituted to upgrade the basic skills of the older workforce. Other training programs dealt with proficiency with the new equipment. There are joint committees on quality of worklife, technical training and communications.

d) *Innovation outcomes*: The plant witnessed an Increase in production and quality. The defect rate fell from 16% to 1%. There was a significant improvement in labour relations and fewer grievances were reported.

5.0 CHARACTERISTICS OF INNOVATIVE WORKPLACE EXPERIENCES.

Based on a study of 19 case studies of new workplace practices by the Quebec Department of Employment[31], the following characteristics emerge:

a) *External factors leading to change*

In a majority of cases, the factor contributing to the decision to implement change was a crisis such as a high probability of the sale or closure of the plant. Another important cause appears to be the need to implement new practices in conjunction with the introduction of new equipment. Less frequent are requirements for increased productivity to maintain a competitive position. New plants embark in innovative work practices from the very beginning.

b) *Instigator of change*

In most cases the decision to innovate originates from management. In some instances, the process was started jointly following some previous experience of labour-management cooperation, mainly through a “Comité d’adaptation de la main-d’oeuvre” (CAMO). In one case, the provincial government, by requesting a “social contract” as a condition of financial assistance, was the catalyst for change.

c) *Prerequisite for introduction of new work practices*

In unionized environments, a change in the daily dynamics of labour relations was a prerequisite to the introduction of new work practices.

d) *Main tools utilized in implementing innovative practices*

In almost all cases joint labour-management committees are formed to oversee the changes. The management structure is significantly modified with fewer managers and fewer levels of management. Most cases try to institute some form of team work where workers acquire increased responsibilities. Training activities are increased and communications are more open and forthcoming.

31 MASCHINO, Dalil, Réal MORISSETTE and Yves TURCOT. Les nouvelles pratiques en milieu de travail au Québec. *Le Marché du travail,* 16, no 7-8, July-August 1995, p.6

Outside consultants are heavily used in most cases. They are usually jointly selected.

e) *Innovation outcomes*

All cases reported improvement in relations between management, unions and workers. Productivity and quality are increased, defects are reduced. There are no major changes in remuneration policies except maybe a slight shift towards supplemental pay based on gain-sharing or productivity improvements. Most of the changes have occurred outside of the collective agreement bargaining process. Letters of Understanding seem to be the preferred method of formalizing the new work practices.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The literature reveals that there are many factors contributing in varying degrees to an innovative workplace environment. A variety of approaches have been adopted including joint committees, team approaches, and changes in labour practices. But, in the province of Quebec, there appears to be an environment of mutual respect between labour and business. This would not have been possible without the continued presence and encouragement of a Quebec Government intent on bringing about closer, less adversarial relations between labour and management.

The literature surveyed for this review has tended to concentrate on the industrial sector. Write-ups of case studies in the other sectors are just starting to appear. It would be of interest to see if the same level of consensus is achieved in these workplaces as well.

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