Building a Joint Workplace Change Process

Background Document for Lessons Learned
on the Innovative Workplace

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1990s, the Canadian Labour Market and Productivity Centre (CLMPC) has focused to a large extent on issues related to the phenomenon known as "economic restructuring". In this connection, the Centre has promoted and supported discussions between labour and business on the roles which these two parties, together with governments, can play, jointly or separately, in promoting economic restructuring.

A major component of this activity has been a recently-completed series of seminars on workplace change. Held between 1994 and 1996 in five different regions across Canada[1]*, the seminars sought to:

1.   promote joint approaches as an effective way to address change issues;

2.   provide an opportunity for an exchange of views and experiences in this area among individuals — labour and management at the workplace level — who would not otherwise have had this opportunity.

The activity, therefore, was not primarily a research project, but rather one focussed on promoting new approaches and consultation between the workplace parties.

The seminars featured presentations by labour and management representatives from local workplaces which had developed innovative joint processes to deal with the challenges of change. These presentations were supplemented by structured round-table discussions. Over the course of the seminars, more than 700 labour, management, academic and government participants listened, questioned, discussed, and dissected workplace change, not as an abstract concept but as a practical process with a very human dimension.

The seminars were as unique as the individual cases presented - some fifteen workplaces, from large public sector utilities and institutions to small, specialized manufacturing firms, and everything in between[2]. Each seminar had its own character, shaped by local socio-economic and political realities and local labour/management relationships, and coloured by the different personalities in attendance. Nonetheless, a number of common elements emerged from all the

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1   Kitchener, Ontario; St John's, Newfoundland; Moncton, New Brunswick; Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; and Vancouver, British Columbia

*   See Table at end of this document for a glossary of acronyms

2   See Table at end of this document for a summary of the fifteen case studies

discussions, which were shared to varying degrees by all the workplaces. It is these that are the focus of this paper.

2.0 KEY ASPECTS OF WORKPLACE CHANGE PROCESSES

The focus of the Seminars was on the *process* of workplace change, and not on the nature of the resulting organization. This report thus offers observations on the key dimensions of the workplace change process which emerged from the presentations and ensuing discussions.

These are not presented as brand-new observations which have escaped the notice of other observers. Rather, what is noteworthy is, first, that these issues have emerged directly from the exchanges between management and labour representatives who are intimately involved on a day-to-day basis in dealing with change. The issues and observations are therefore strongly rooted in the workplace. Of note, second, is the fact that there seems to be substantial consensus from both parties regarding these issues and processes. As such, they may reflect a practical wisdom, born of experience, around innovative labour/management relationships.

It must also be kept in mind that the environments in which workplaces operate, be they economic, market-related, or otherwise, are not static. Because they shift and evolve, workplaces themselves must react and adapt to changing realities. Joint change processes, therefore, are unlikely to unfold smoothly and problem-free. The workplaces featured at the seminars had difficult periods before the seminars, and many have had difficult periods since.

With these points in mind, the paper turns to discuss a number of important defining features of joint change processes.

A. Preconditions for a Joint Change Process

2.1 Crisis often triggers a change process.

In many of the cases presented during the seminars, labour and management reported that they opted to undertake a joint change process only because at the

time they had no choice. The need to change often is driven by a crisis or a threat to the well-being of the company, the workers, or both. This may reflect competitive pressures, financial factors, safety issues, quality considerations, or labour relations crises, among others.

When things are going well, there may be less disposition to question how things are being done. It may therefore take a situation where things are going badly to "get the attention" of management, union and workers — to help them agree that fundamental change is necessary and that this will involve a change in the behaviour of *both* parties. Even then, recognition of the need to change may not be immediate, but may require discussion and review before the full implications of the threat on the organization are evident.

The crises, or turning points, took many forms. Until 1992, for example, the **Saskatchewan Provincial Government** and its major union, the **Saskatchewan Government Employees Union (SGEU)**, had a traditional, and adversarial relationship. In 1992, they were unable to come to an agreement on key terms, which led to a 5 month strike. This created a determination on both sides to improve the relationship and to set up necessary mechanisms to do so.

Similarly, **Ford Electronics** in Markham, Ontario, faced the fact that it could not compete globally with other Ford Motor Corporation parts plants. There was a strong belief that if the plant did not become more competitive it would close, and this proved to be a catalyst for change.

Against this backdrop, those workplaces which undertook change processes in the absence of a crisis were notable. It is preferable to deal with workplace change in a more planned and systematic manner when organizations will have more flexibility, resources and time to plan their actions. At **St. Clare's Mercy Hospital** in St. John's, for example, the issue of the distribution of duties between Registered Nurses and RNA's was the question which initiated a change process, although it was not seen as a crisis threatening the viability of the institution. A study group could be, and was, set up to examine the question in a systematic fashion.

2.2 Building the labour-management relationship.

In many of the workplaces we looked at, labour and management had to invest time and effort up front in improving their working relationship, before embarking on a specific change process. In several workplaces, this involved a specific review of past failed efforts to initiate workplace change processes, diagnosis of

the reasons for the failure, and determination not to repeat the same mistakes. In a number of cases, this joint diagnosis concluded that the earlier efforts had failed because they were led by one side only — usually management — without the full involvement of labour.

In discussions, many participants stressed the importance of clearing up any "old baggage" between the parties before newer processes and relationships are explored. Airing historical concerns in a constructive manner can help clear the path for new initiatives and increase the likelihood of not repeating past mistakes.

Ford Electronics, for example, applied this process before undertaking its current team initiative. The Markham plant had experimented with employee involvement and teams for more than a decade, with varying degrees of success. These led to some progress at the Markham plant, but because management and the unions were unwilling to move beyond their traditional positions in terms of decision making, control and adversarial approaches to employee relations, and because a number of employees and managers felt threatened by changes in the organization of work, gains were short-lived.

Before the most recent team initiative could begin, the union and management had to undergo a lengthy assessment process to determine why previous initiatives had failed. A number of committees were created to solicit input from all groups within the plant. These committees were mandated to examine the reasons for earlier failures and to develop strategies to deal with all of the issues raised before launching its current team initiative.

Similarly, **NB Tel** had made early attempts to initiate change process without establishing a Partnership Agreement with the union the **Communications, Energy and Paperworkers** which demonstrated the commitment of both parties to the process. This process did not succeed, and was replaced by a process where both parties were clearly involved, and which was able to make much more progress.

This process was also followed at **Walker Exhausts**, in Cambridge, Ontario. The plant had a long history of quality programs of various types, beginning with a Quality of Worklife program in 1979. Other programs introduced by the company with little or no consultation with the union prior to implementation included, Employee Involvement, Quality Improvement, Kaizen and job-rotation. These early efforts are regarded as mostly unsuccessful and created a significant barrier to overcome before another program or process could be introduced.

The **USWA** local at Walker Exhausts was determined to oppose the most recent change process if it proved to be another management driven exercise. With the support of its national office, the local was able to develop their own agenda for workplace change to meet the interests of its members. In contrast to the other initiatives, the resulting TQM process at the Cambridge plant was much more of a joint effort, seeking to involve the union in a more formal and regular way.

It was also clear that the beginning stages of a change process may occur against a backdrop of tension and mistrust. Difficult though it may be to do so, the parties have to accept that if both are part of the problem, then both must be part of the solution. The change process requires a respect for the legitimacy of each side, and a shared desire for change.

In this regard we noted that the relationship between the parties did not have to be perfect; there simply had to be sufficient trust to proceed to work together. In most cases, the process of working together further developed and deepened that trust.

Finally, each party must also want to change, and must be persuaded that the other party does, as well. Both must thus share a commitment to the change process, and must be confident that the other will not "bail out" of the process unilaterally at the first sign of difficulty. This is not to say that exit from the process is impossible, but rather that the conditions of such exit should be discussed and mutually agreed.

2.3 Self-interest is an important motivator for both parties.

Management and workers stressed in the discussions that the change process is not driven by altruistic motivations. Each party has its own sets of goals and interests, which they naturally seek to promote through the change process. Management, for example, tended to look at accomplishments related to productivity, costs, or quality, while labour assessments included impacts on health/safety, grievances, and absenteeism, among others.

For both parties, therefore, it was essential to identify clearly their own interests as they got involved in the change process. At the same time, it was agreed that it is essential to understand and accept the *other party's* interests in getting involved, to appreciate the differences; and, in many cases, agree to disagree on some issues to get the process started. Where these interests overlapped was often the starting point for joint efforts.

At **Weldwood** in Williams Lake, B.C., when the Employee Involvement initiative was first introduced, the union (the **I.W.A**.) was hesitant to encourage its members to participate. But because it could see that keeping the plant running productively was the best way to secure jobs for the membership in the long-run, and also that it would make workers' jobs more interesting, it committed itself to working with management to make the program work.

Participants in the CLMPC seminar discussions also noted that identifying the parties' separate interests gave each a set of criteria which they could use at a later point in evaluating the results of the change process. It was also important, at an early stage in the process, to review and agree on the criteria on which the success of the process would eventually be judged. In contrast to the discussions, however, relatively few of the participating workplaces deliberately set up such evaluation criteria at an early point in the process, although several did describe the outcomes of their innovations in terms of how they addressed the parties' separate interests.

Perhaps the clearest example of this was given by **Canadian Airlines** and the **CAW** with respect to a jointly-developed Modified Return to Work Program. The company's stress on costs and productivity, and the union's interest in the impacts on the individual themselves, were both clear in the parties' assessments of the results of this initiative.

From a company perspective, the program:

- maintained productivity levels through the use of already trained workers;

- eliminated the non-recoverable costs of training new workers

- reduced costs involved in hiring and training new workers;

- dramatically reduced WCB costs and in B.C. alone has resulted in a savings of approximately $100,000;

- improved employee morale.

The biggest saving however, was having an employee available to perform productive work, without relief and additional overtime costs. When an employee is off on WCB the company is really paying two employees — the one at home and the one who replaces the injured worker.

From an employee point of view the program:

- encouraged speedy rehabilitation

- maintained contact with co-workers;

- reduced the amount of time needed for a worker to return to full work capacity;

- maintained employee identity, self respect and work skills;

- provided job security.

From a union perspective the program reduced costs for the employee-controlled disability insurance plan. Moreover, union members could see the

union actively representing their members' interests at the local and national level, which strengthened membership support for the union.

2.4   Risks Must Be Recognized

Seminar participants stressed that joint processes bring significant risks, which must be reviewed, considered and accepted by both sides.

Management, for example, may have to deal with the implications of sharing decisionmaking authority more extensively with workers, and the feelings of loss of power that this may bring. Labour may acquire greater involvement in decisionmaking, but this will likely bring a shared accountability for the decisions themselves and the danger of appearing to be co-opted into a management agenda.

Both parties need to recognize that a joint process will very likely change the way decisions are made. This does not mean that the parties should at once contemplate abandoning more conventional forms of bargaining or dispute resolution mechanisms such as the traditional grievance procedure. Far from it; these approaches remain valid. However, they do need to recognize that the change process being considered may eventually have implications for these practices, and that until these implications are clear, both sides face uncertainties and risks.

Each party must also understand that while it is taking risks by participating in a joint change process, so is the other party. To help the process go forward, then, each side can look for ways to help the other deal with the risks it has taken by entering the process. This co-operation may in fact reflect enlightened self-interest, if it contributes to the change process moving forward.

2.5   Buy-in at All Levels

(a)   At the Top

In almost all cases, the change processes we examined had the support and buy-in from the top-level leaders from both sides. This was important to giving the process an essential legitimacy within each constituency which supported the expenditure of effort on the process. In a number of cases, the senior leaders led the process in a hands-on way.

At **St. Clare's Mercy Hospital/NAPE**, the initiation of the task force on the role of nursing assistants was championed and personally led by the CEO of the hospital.

In the case of the **Government of Saskatchewan and SGEU**, the decision to proceed with new work methods followed a ground-breaking meeting in January 1994 between Deputy Ministers and senior union leadership. This meeting was called to begin the process of putting into action the understanding on improved relationships reached in the most recent round of bargaining. As a result of the leadership and commitment demonstrated at this meeting, a permanent union-management steering committee was set up on developing a better understanding to govern the operation of local union-management committees throughout the province.

(b)   Day-to-day Leadership — The "Champions"

More often, however, this top-level leadership was complemented at the working level with "champions" on both sides, who actually drove the process on a day-to-day basis. These champions were key people. They had to have the trust of their own constituency and of the other, be prepared to take the personal risks of leading a process involving the other side, and had to be able to keep their own side in the process if the going got tough.

Since the champions turned over or burned out, workplaces had to come up with processes for identifying and preparing replacements. Many workplaces set up an array of joint committees which served as training grounds for the new generations of process leaders.

(c)   Buy-In Throughout the Workplace

Leaders and champions alone cannot carry the process; there must be broader support from the workplace at large. On the labour side, this will include both local union members and regional and national leadership. For management, support from senior executives to line supervisors will be important. This buy-in will have to be actively sought through a process of communication, discussion, and information-gathering.

At the same time, and depending upon the workplace, it may be advisable to seek the support of other stakeholder groups, including shareholders or customers, for the new joint initiatives.

Without a critical level of commitment extending through all parties in an organization, the change process may prematurely fail if one party becomes uncomfortable with the process and withdraws from it.

2.6   Learn From Others

(a)   Look at Other Workplaces

All seminar participants agreed that there is an increasing amount of experience available regarding joint processes. Although each organization's situation, needs and goals are unique, it is helpful to learn from the experience of others. These may be other companies, other plants or sections in one's own company, and other unions and union representatives who have knowledge and experience with change initiatives.

Gathering such information is best done together, through joint participation in information seminars, site visits or common readings and video presentations. If labour and management representatives can be exposed to the same information, followed by opportunities to discuss it, this can help build a joint understanding and commitment that is critical to a change process.

As they set up their Employee Involvement program, for example, management from **LOF Glass**, in Collingwood, Ontario, and local leaders from the **Aluminum, Brick and Glassworkers' International Union** visited other plants to examine their EI programs and benchmark these.

(b)   Consider Third-Party Help

Many labour and management seminar participants, drawing on their own experience, noted that third party facilitation can help the parties to acquire knowledge and build commitment to a change process, as well as helping steer the process as it gets under way. If the relationship between the parties is strained and lacking in trust, for example, a mutually trusted third party may be helpful. Moreover, if the skills required to introduce a process are not available in an organization, an external resource person can help fill the gap.

In discussions between the **Westin Bayshore Hotel** and the **Restaurant and Culinary Employees Union Local 40,** for example, the joint Steering Committee established to oversee the introduction of the Service Express program used an external facilitator to help address employee concerns regarding the program. The Steering Committee worked well both because of the high level of trust and mutual respect that existed between union and management, and also because the facilitator was trusted by both sides to help them reconcile their interests.

The selection of the third party, however, must itself be a joint process. If one party imposes its choice on the other, this may contribute to mistrust which may surface with harmful consequences at a later point.

B.   Starting the Process

2.7   Establish a Common Understanding on Proceeding

(a)   Identify Common Interests

Having recognized the legitimacy of each other's separate interests, management and labour will be in a position to explore where those interests overlap and where, as a result, there may be objectives common to both parties. These, in turn, may be the basis for joint approaches.

For example, management's interest in productivity and workers' interest in security will reflect shared concerns related to the ongoing viability of the organization. Similarly, both sides will share an interest in having a safe workplace, both because of the personal cost of accidents as well as because of the cost to the organization.

In late 1993, management from **Prince County Hospital**, Summerside, P.E.I., invited representatives from the national office of the **Canadian Federation of Labour** to make a presentation to the four hospital unions and management on the basic principles of employee involvement, empowerment, and shared decision making. This presentation led to a larger labour/management workshop to jointly examine the current status of the hospital, to define more clearly the roles of management and the roles of the unions, to identify common objectives and priorities (if any), to examine trends affecting the hospital and finally to decide whether they should proceed on an agenda to work together.

In the discussions that followed the two groups realized that they had many common priorities and objectives. As a result they agreed to create a Steering Committee to oversee further efforts to identify and restructure various processes in the hospital.

It must be remembered that while identifying common interests and objectives, management and the union should appreciate and respect each other's differences. Agreeing to disagree on certain issues is natural and need not impede continued discussion and action.

(b)   Set the Ground Rules

It is important at this stage to set the "ground rules" under which the process will proceed. These ground rules will govern the parties' and participants' relationships to each other during the process. The areas these cover will be decided by the parties. They can relate to the nature of the discussions (open and frank, with no consequences or recriminations outside the room), the degree

of confidentiality of discussions, the decisionmaking process (consensus or otherwise), the relationship of the process to the collective bargaining process, etc.

At **Weldwood in Williams Lake, B.C.,** the company and the **IWA** set a number of ground rules for their Employee Involvement Initiative. For example, it was explicitly agreed that labour relations issues were not to be addressed using this venue, nor were projects directed solely at increasing workload or reducing manpower to be contemplated. Team meetings were to be held outside of regular shifts as much as possible, but team members were to be compensated for their time. The timing and length of meetings were to be determined by the teams.

Without an agreed-upon set of rules of this sort, there is a clear risk of one party acting in a way unacceptable to the other, with resulting dangers for the process as a whole.

2.8   Write Down the Agreements

In many workplaces, when labour and management had come to an agreement on how they wanted to proceed in dealing jointly with the changes they faced (that is, they had set the objectives and the ground rules), they wrote them down and formalized them.

The form of these agreements varied from partnership agreements to joint vision statements, as did their contractual nature and their specific contents. But they served similar purposes.

In particular, they sought to remove any ambiguity regarding what the parties had agreed on, so that there was a clear guide for proceeding. For example, they might outline the goals and objectives of the change initiative, highlight its guiding principles and values, and ensure joint ownership and control of the agenda and process of change.

Other elements of an agreement could include statements on the time period for the exercise (if applicable) and an exit clause specifying how the parties can get out of the process should they decide to do so.

Such agreements help to maintain long term commitment to the process and access to resources. Significantly, they also serve as a point of reference which will outlast the involvement of those who developed them. In particular, as management and labour leaders come and go over the longer term, written agreements will be very important in helping keep the process on track and

consistent over time. Reference to formal agreements will help new participants in the change process to "get up to speed" and understand the main features of the process relatively quickly.

For example, at **New Brunswick Telephone**, the company and the **CEP** signed a "partnership agreement" to guide the redesign of their workplace using a socio technical systems approach to change. The "partnership agreement" outlines the consensus between the company and union on the reasons for change, on the objectives of change, on the basic principles that will govern the change process, on the various structures that will be put into place, and the guidelines which will govern joint participation in the process.

Reflecting their agreements on interests and ground rules, management and unions may choose to develop a Joint Vision Statement. This statement often highlights the beliefs, principles, concepts and/or values that will guide their decisions and actions. It puts into words how an organization will approach and conduct its everyday operations in future. It represents a commitment to an alternative and desirable way of organizing the workplace, and may be stated as an "ideal" picture of how the organization sees itself in the future. It may also seek to help stakeholders see the type and direction of change that is needed by describing the concepts that will guide how the organization should work in the future.

2.9   Address Real Workplace Issues

It was emphasized in both the cases and the discussions that the issues which the change process tackles must be real issues, jointly recognized by both labour and management as being current and important to the workplace. Without this sense of relevance, efforts expended in the process will decline. 'Busywork' will soon be rejected, and motivation and commitment will suffer. The involvement of both parties in issue identification will likely help ensure that the issues are relevant to both.

Having identified the areas to be addressed, participants will go on to study and discuss these issues and propose changes which should be made in these areas. These may include small changes (removing of reserved parking spaces for management, new dress code, uniformly-coloured hard hats) or they may be major (new work organizations, new technologies, new equipment, new training decisionmaking structures, etc.).

The design and implementation of these changes should be carried out by those directly responsible for doing the work. This both ensures employee involvement and ensures that the change will be carried out.

At **NB Tel/CEP** for example, design teams were created to research and recommend new work redesign. They consisted of between 8 and 15 people in each work area, and their responsibility was to analyze their work system in accordance with the mandate provided by one of two Regional Steering Committees and STS process guidelines. In order to do this, they gathered input from fellow employees and kept colleagues informed of the progress of redesign. Ultimately, when consensus was reached, their responsibility would be to develop an implementation plan, and to implement the approved design within their work area. The ultimate goal of this exercise was to achieve consensus around a redesign of work processes by a number of largely self-directed work teams. These teams will be the basic building blocks of the new organization.

2.10   Alter Decision Making and Other Structures Where Appropriate

In most cases, the parties set up joint decisionmaking structures to guide their joint change processes. The focus of these structures was on issues addressed through the change process; they were not mandated to circumvent or replace existing forms of traditional management or union accountability and decisionmaking in the workplace. They were in some senses "parallel" structures whose role could change over time with the concurrence and participation of management and labour.

Often, a central Steering Committee or similar group was set up to give overall guidance to the change process. It was usually jointly chaired and involved roughly equal numbers of management and labour representatives. The work involved in pursuing change, however, might quickly expand beyond the capacity of the Steering Committee and necessitate the establishment of other joint study groups, working committees and similar structures, tasked with particular activities. These structures for the most part operated under the guidance of the Steering Committee.

It was noted that these new structures can be very useful, not only because they allow more work to be done as part of the change process, but also because they increase the involvement of a much larger number of management and labour members in the change process, which will likely increase their familiarity and support for the over all process itself. A workplace may in fact deliberately set out to maximize the involvement of other stakeholders through such subcommittees, for this reason.

Finally and not to be overlooked, such subcommittees are a source of new leaders who in time will take over the leadership of the process as a whole.

Two examples illustrate this approach to new structures:

- At Ford Electronics, the entire team initiative is led and supported by a Joint Steering Committee (JSC) of five members from management, four from the IAM local and three from the CAW local. This committee has addressed issues such as documenting team roles and responsibilities, defining what empowerment means, revising the suggestion program to realign it with a team focus, and revising the plant's missions, values and guiding principles. The JSC provides direction to the joint labour-management training body which supports the development and maintenance of teams. This body has also developed Ford Electronics' five- and ten-year plans.

- At New Brunswick Telephone/CEP, an organization-wide parallel structure was created to oversee and implement change because of the size and the geographically disparate nature of the company. The structure consists of a company wide Executive Steering Committee, two Regional Steering Committees (the province is divided into Eastern and Western regions for the purpose of the change process) and a number of specific design teams in each region. The process as a whole, and each of the regional processes, are serviced by a small internal Consultant Team, consisting of NB Tel union and nonunion employees.

C.   Maintaining a Joint Change Process

2.11   Joint Problem Solving, and Action

Critical to the approach of these new decisionmaking structures was their approach to their task. Reflecting earlier agreements about the legitimacy of the parties and of their goals, it was essential that they act on the understanding that the objective is for both to achieve their goals to the maximum degree possible. The approach is therefore not one of adversarial bargaining or posturing, but of joint consideration of how to best bring about a result which advances the interests of both parties — joint problem solving.

It was agreed, however, that such problem-solving is not intended to replace collective bargaining. In many cases, it will deal with issues not directly covered by the collective agreement. In other cases, it may provide a way of finding solutions to problems which can then be written into the collective agreement.

It is also important to act on joint decisions. The Steering Committee may make recommendations to management for action, or a subcommittee may recommend that the Steering Committee take a particular step. It is extremely

important that such recommendations for action be followed if they are jointly developed. If they are not followed, reasons for this must be given by those to whom they were addressed. That is to say, a transparent follow-up process is needed.

Without such a process, those developing the recommendations will quickly recognize that they are wasting their time, and their commitment to the process will wane.

2.12 Small Successes Build the Basis for Tackling Bigger Issues.

In setting priorities for action, participants in the change process in many workplaces found it important to start with initiatives where the probability of success was high. Early success – even on small issues – helped build momentum, confidence and support, and helped overcome resistance to change. Successes were communicated to both constituencies as flowing from the change process. As trust and confidence increased, both sides grew more willing to tackle bigger and more complex issues.

One P.E.I. hospital, for example, included the issue of the allocation of parking spaces in its initial agenda and sorting out this issue gave the participants confidence to address others.

Achieving success with some issues before moving on to others was an approach used by **Fishery Products International** and the **FFAW**. In the beginning of their change effort, they saw improvements to health and safety as a top priority. However, the health and safety changes were part of a larger pattern of changes in the overall relationship. The approach to improving health and safety in this early period included setting up a system of joint local health and safety committees. FPI and the union developed their own joint WHMIS (Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System) training using union and management trainers. By the end of 1988, lost-time accidents had been reduced by 25% from the number in 1986.

Publicizing success also maintains commitment. At **LOF Glass/ABGIU**, in Collingwood, Ontario, one of the four full-time union employees is an Employee Involvement Co-ordinator, whose job includes publishing a weekly newsletter featuring the various Employee Involvement initiatives under way at the plant.

2.13 Training Underpinned the Change Process.

(a)   New Skills for Participants in the Change Process

Participants in the change processes often found that they needed new skills to help them contribute effectively to the process. Recognizing this, many workplaces provided participants with "process" skills such as team-building, problem-solving, and communications. For some, such " soft skills" training was the first thing new teams or committees did.

At **Weldwood,** for example, the Company and the **IWA** felt that to effectively implement the involvement concept, they needed to develop a comprehensive training and development program. Team members are first taught the guidelines established by the Advisory Committee. They also receive structured orientation training to, among other things, explain the process they are to follow, get to know other members on the team, learn the rules of conduct that will be used to govern their meetings and finally to choose a name for their team and project. Team members learn techniques such as brainstorming, flow charting, checksheets and multivoting. Members are also taught how to develop feedback surveys and presentation skills.

(b)   Work Skills in the New Organization

The new work organizations developed through joint processes themselves presented important new skill needs, and required of the workplace a strong and ongoing training commitment. Frequently, managers and first-line supervisors required "soft" skills which would help them perform new roles in new work organizations. Technical skills development, upgrading and cross-training were also often needed to enable new work organizations to produce quality goods or services. Sometimes this uncovered an even more basic need for need for foundation skills training – literacy, computers, numeracy, and so on.

Training at **Ford Electronics**, for example, became a key driver in its team process. Training became a central element in Ford's organizational culture, and was viewed as a continuous effort. In addition to soft skills training there was extensive technical, health and safety and basic literacy and numeracy training. All training was directed and managed by a Training Advisory Board made up of management, senior union representatives and training personnel. A number of partnerships were developed between Ford and outside bodies, such as the Sectoral Skills Council and Seneca College to provide support for technical and basic skills training.

In summary, there was agreement among most seminar participants that the training implications of the change process must not be underestimated.

2.14 Necessary Resources — Time and Money

It was noted that change processes can be hindered if the resources needed to support them are not available and adequate. Participants must be allowed the time needed to participate fully in the process and communicate with constituents. Funds for training, third-party facilitation, seminars, communications activities, etc., must also be available to ensure that lack of attention to the "mechanics" of the process does not affect its success. These resources will clearly be much less of an issue if the senior management and labour leadership are fully behind the process.

The **Saskatchewan Government** recognized the role that resources play in supporting joint processes. With the unprecedented success of new forms of negotiation between the **Public Service Commission** and the **SGEU,** the Government allocated a special fund to support similar activities for local union-management committees. It would be used for joint training of union and management personnel in interest-based problem solving; training of facilitators; seminars and workshops on innovative work arrangements in other workplaces; site visits by union and management to innovative work sites; provision of facilitation services to departmental union-management committees; and, tracking and record keeping of committee initiatives and results.

2.15 Communication and Information Feed the Process.

Communication and information-sharing, it was agreed, underpin the change process at all times.

As the process matures, for example, it will be important to publicize its objectives and progress widely throughout the workplace so that all stakeholders understand and support the direction of the change effort. Joint statements and agreements should be available to all stakeholders.

Above all, it will be essential to avoid giving the impression that the changes are being run by a select little group of management and labour representatives who are operating largely in secret and are not keeping the stakeholders informed.

This is a particular danger on the labour side, where participants in the change process risk being perceived as "being in bed with" management. The next union elections may then bring changes. For management participants there are also

risks; if participants fail to keep senior management informed of developments they may find the latter forced to overturn a joint decision taken as part of the change process. The implications of this for the process and the management participants will probably be serious.

The change process itself will also need a constant infusion of information. This may be financial information from management, or it may be qualitative feedback on worker attitudes to the effects of a particular recent change. Each party, in fact, may find itself called to release information which it has not traditionally released to the "other side". Its readiness to do this will hopefully reflect its growing trust in the other party and will at the same time likely contribute to the further development of this trust.

2.16 Expand Employee Involvement to Increase Buy-In

In discussions, it was pointed out that employee involvement takes two forms, both of which are critical to maintaining the joint change process.

First, as part of the operation of the Steering Committee or other joint subcommittees, employees must be given the opportunity and responsibility to provide advice, recommendations, and take decisions in areas in which they have not been involved before. The employee voice, together with that of management, determines how actions will flow from the operations of these bodies.

The participation of as many employees as possible in joint subcommittees, task groups, etc, as part of the change process is important to securing the buy-in of workers at the start of a joint change process, and becomes a critical element in keeping the process going and broadening the commitment to change throughout the organization. If not already in place, structures should be implemented, modified or expanded to ensure maximum worker involvement in these structures.

Second, the changes introduced into the workplace through the change process should have the effect of giving employees more decisionmaking power over how they do their own job. This may be an individual empowerment, or it may be exercised through the actions of a self-directed team.

As an illustration, the team initiative at **Ford Electronics** affects all employees. Plant-wide there are approximately 50 product teams which are comprised of approximately 250 sub-teams. Teams are structured to achieve specific objectives and stretch objectives. The teams also set their own objectives and manage them to continuously improve their products and processes. Employees

views were surveyed at the beginning of the team initiative and their input on team structure and administration occurs on an ongoing basis.

D.   Making It Last

2.17 Evaluation — A Key to Long-term Susainability

The continued participation of each party will be strongly affected by the extent to which its own objectives are being met by the joint process. Similarly, in a joint process, each party will have a strong stake in how well the goals *of the other party* are being met. If one party's criteria are uniformly met, while the other's are not, this should send warnings that the process needs rebalancing before it becomes so one-sided that it ceases to be sustainable over the longer term.

The seminar discussions and the workplace presentations presented interesting differences on this subject. In the discussions, participants stressed that without definite indications that the process is making a difference, the commitment and motivation of all participants will decline. Monitoring progress against the goals of the process may also help the parties determine if the goals themselves need adjustment. Yet in the workplace cases themselves, assessment of progress and outcomes was for the most part not rigorously undertaken; the parties seemed to take their progress and success "on faith".

From a management perspective, the outcomes of joint processes can be assessed in terms of their impacts on traditional operational measures such as quality, productivity, profits, costs, share value, or customer satisfaction, in which progress over time can be regularly monitored. Achievement of management goals can also be gauged by single events (awards, citations, ISO 9000 certification, landing an important contract, etc.), which confirm the excellent performance of the workplace in various areas.

Similarly, from a labour perspective, impacts can be assessed in such areas as numbers of grievances or accidents, training expenditures, reduction of layoffs, or absenteeism, where trends over time can be examined. Individual events (accident prevention/reduction awards, environment awards, etc.) can supplement these measures, as can periodic employee satisfaction surveys.

For both labour and management, however, there will be a further set of more qualitative criteria on which the success of the joint process can be judged. For

many, these will be particularly watched. These criteria will be subjective, and will vary from person to person. Because of this, they will provide only an impression — but an important one — of how the process is working. Because they are personal, they should not be underrated.

Some of the qualitative criteria used in workplaces include:

- the number of issues being discussed as part of the joint process. If this number is increasing, it may indicate the parties' underlying confidence in the process and its ability to contribute to lasting solutions.

- attendance at union meetings. If it is low, it may be seen as an indicator of members' general satisfaction with the way things are going.

- talk on the shop floor. This continuous informal sounding of worker views must be listened to.

2.18 With Time, Joint Processes Can Define the Workplace

It is essential to recognize that regardless of how well they achieve management and labour objectives, successful change processes do not end. Rather, they will likely become the ongoing process by which labour and management relate to each other on a daily basis.

Maintaining this process will require continuous effort by both parties, who must be prepared to continuously check and re-evaluate how the change process is working and what can be improved. This will involve both continual monitoring of operational and people-related statistics (productivity, grievances, etc.) as well as evaluating the success of the joint process in more subjective terms. In short, it will require from each, a commitment to continuous improvement, both in their relationship and in the ways in which that relationship affects how the workplace conducts its business.

Having achieved success in some fields, the parties will likely have the confidence to undertake joint initiatives in others. In this way, the approaches implicit in the joint change process will spread more widely throughout the range of activities undertaken by the organization. Eventually, change processes can become a permanent and widespread part of the culture of the organization.

Two examples illustrate how initial change processes can be extended more widely and more permanently throughout organizations:

As part of its review process of the future role of RNAs, the **St. Clare's/NAPE** joint process included a monitoring mechanism to oversee the implementation of all recommendations and an evaluation of the review process itself. Results from the evaluation questionnaire found that a number of factors contributed to the success of the process, including:

- an open discussion of the issues;

- the clear leadership and skills of the chairperson;

- cooperation and trust among group members;

- a commitment to the project's objectives;

- implementation of solutions to some of the issues during the task force's deliberations;

- timely analysis and follow-up of group work;

- the in-depth knowledge of the issues by all group members;

- commitment to the project's objectives from the highest level of the organizations involved.

The success of the task force has led to additional joint activities and has had a positive effect on the overall labour relations climate at the hospital.

In similar fashion, with the success of its many joint projects and an understanding of the need to continue to grow and protect job security, **SaskChem** and the **CEP** decided to extend the philosophy of working together to the development of new products. A fledgling committee of managerial and union employees are now responsible for the development of new products and ideas.

3.0 CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

How workplaces deal with the *process* of change can have signficant impacts not only on how successfully changes are introduced, but also on the continuing success and viability of the workplace itself. This in turn will have profound implications for the lives and livelihoods of everyone involved. The workplace presentations and discussions at the CLMPC seminars provided an opportunity for management and labour participants to explore the process of workplace change from their respective viewpoints and share those perceptions with others.

In the process, they highlighted a set of common themes, lessons and observations which can be of great practical value to unions, workers and management who are considering a change process. Rooted in the workplace, these reflected the practical experience of people engaged in dealing with change on a day-to-day basis. They also identified a number of issues which a workplace considering a joint change process will likely have to address.

None of the workplaces featured at the seminars addressed all these issues equally effectively. Some have faced continuing difficulties in dealing with the changing environments in which they operate. In addition, not all have yet had the time to develop into mature processes, and some remain quite new.

Nevertheless, it was apparent from the workplace presentations and the seminar discussions that where the workplace parties are able to deal with change issues in a way which allows both sides to contribute creatively to joint solutions, the results can be very positive for both. Practices which permit both to initiate and develop a sense of day-to-day trust appear central to these approaches.

In conclusion, it bears repeating that while the main workplace change issues were addressed in most workplaces, assessing the impacts of these processes in a relatively rigorous or formal way has for the most part not been a priority for participating workplaces — in spite of the importance assigned to such assessments by the discussions among seminar participants. There is clearly a potential for further work in this area of assessing outcomes.