



Share some 21st Century Insights
with Joe Mulhall

Bringing the 21st Century Workplace to Life – Pt. 2

The Canadian Union of Skilled Workers was formed to provide a pathway for workers to move from the 20th Century workplace to the 21st Century workplace. When we set out on the path to build CUSW we did so with a clear understanding that we would need to change our thinking about the role of the worker in the modern workplace.

There would need to be a transformation from reactive to proactive in the way that we approach our role at work. The members of CUSW would need to have a clear understanding of our goals and be a part of the transition. Managing the changing environment around us would be essential.

This concept is captured in the banner of Working Today – Building for Tomorrow that was added to the cover on the CUSW Constitution after our 2nd Convention. We understood that changes in the way work was organized and managed would emerge in different workplaces at different times. Members would experience life in the workplace very differently depending on what type of management style was in place. Having this message displayed up front on the Constitution would remind members that

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change was underway and that we would need to lead that change. But first we would need to be able to recognize the world around us.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, Management was trying to understand the drivers that would increase productivity and increase profit. They saw the workforce as a barrier to success. The

idea of Human Resource Management (HRM) emerged as a means of coordinating the introduction of management systems that would produce these results. One of these systems was introduced by Frederick Taylor. “Taylorism” or Scientific Management as it came to be known, is a production efficiency methodology that breaks every action, job or task into small and simple segments which can be easily analyzed and controlled.

This method of managing the workplace gave production managers a dangerously high level of uncontrolled power and the demands of work intensified.

Workers became dissatisfied, resentful and hostile towards the work environment and became angry. Scientific management lowered worker morale and increased existing conflict. The role of unions in this environment was focused on offsetting the power of the manager. Although these ideas continue to exist in some workplaces even today, de-skilling the workforce and intensifying work have proved to be less helpful than Taylor suggested.

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By 1970 there had already been a shift in management techniques in many workplaces. Programs such as Total Quality Management, Continuous Improvement, Kaizen and LEAN Production, that focused on trying to increase production, opened the possibility for looking at new ways of managing. These ideas revolutionized the mental model for managers by suggesting that they replace thinking about how to get people to do things with thinking about how to help people do things. (Robert Greenleaf 1970)

This shift was the first step in moving towards the 21st Century worker model that CUSW is built around. By the turn of the century, managers of all stripes began to realize that when “knowledge workers” were given the opportunity to contribute their ideas to the work at hand, innovation and productivity increased. The negative effects of scientific management were eliminated as workers engaged with their work and realized satisfaction in the success.

At the start of the 21st century a whole new wave of HRM (Human Relations Management) studies focused on the role of the “manager” and the “workers” within a new model based on helping people do things and not on making people do things. The concept of the “production” manager has not yet disappeared, however it is generally projected that the purpose of the

manager will change.

Looking at a number of these studies undertaken by the HRM community found that the following points rate to be the most important ideas regarding the role of management going forward.

The start of the 21st century saw a whole new wave of HRM (Human Relations Management) studies

➤ **Management is for everyone.**

As educational levels rise and information technology accelerates, the distinction between “managers” and “workers” will fade away and management knowledge will be everyone’s responsibility.

➤ **Management is for learners.** As information becomes the chief product of every business and as knowledge continues to explode, everyone will be a learner and the manager’s foremost task will to promote learning.

➤ **Management is based on communicating.** As techniques for planning, strategizing, decision-making, and problem solving become the common province of everyone in the organization, the need for improving communication will be paramount and managers will be increasingly using dialogue and

other communication tools.

➤ **Management is about change.** As technology and information reshape all our lives, change management will be “business as usual” and managers will be change agents who guide everyone to find and embrace the best new practices.

➤ **Management is broad based.** As boundaries disappear within organizations and in the world at large, the scope of management will grow and managers will be organizational development experts, diversity experts, facilitation experts, consultation experts – and much more.

These management studies all show an increased role for the worker in the workplace. CUSW was built to respond to this new and emerging workplace. The CUSW Convention in April 2015 amended the representation model for the workers to align with the workplace of the future. CUSW members will have a greater role in the workplace and there will be no room for the outside Third Party Unions of the 20th Century.

Like the managers of the future, the Stewards and H&S representatives will also become organizational development experts, diversity experts, facilitation experts, consultation experts – and much more.

We are positioned to take on our role, now we need to give our members the tools to be successful.