



Share some 21st Century insights  
with Joe Mulhall

## Democratization

# Democracy and Participation in CUSW

The 21st Century in Canada brings with it a new era in the way that people interact with each other and with the world around them. This phenomenon is seen in all aspects of our lives.

The Internet is a good example. Before the Internet there was very little easily accessible access to information. Today we have E-Health, on-line encyclopedia such as Wikipedia and access to the News and Weather with the touch of a few keystrokes. We no longer need to rely on visits to the Doctor or the voice of a Professor to get the information we need to make good decisions about the world around us. Life has changed. We can consume information in a way and at a speed that could not have been imagined only 100 years ago.

This access to information has changed the way that we live. Smart phones are everywhere. People do their banking, watch movies, play games and even do their shopping on line. The interface and reliance that we had on experts has been dramatically reduced. As the methods of living our lives changes so does the dynamic between people.

People by definition are social beings. We have a natural urge to interact with the community around us. As our exposure and reliance on professionals and other experts has declined, our use of Internet tools such as Facebook and Twitter have grown in leaps and bounds.

Instead of getting the opinion of one Expert face to face, we can now connect with thousands instantaneously. Groups such as LinkedIn allow people of like mind to meet and exchange ideas online. Innovation Hubs

where people come together are everywhere. Crowd sourcing for development of new products is recognized as a legitimate method of engaging people to invest. We are turning information into knowledge by doing what comes naturally - connecting with each other!!

People in the broader community have learned to participate in the New Economy in ways that improve their control over the choices that they make and the outcomes that they experience.

CUSW was formed for the purpose of providing an alternative 21st Century Union for workers. We understood that the need to come together in the workplace to bargain collectively with employers had not changed, but that the methods for doing so needed to.

The CUSW Constitution embraces democratization of the Union through Participation as the key to changing the dynamics in the modern Union. When we introduce Participation we ask members who have traditionally functioned in follower roles to adopt participatory roles. Appointed Stewards

CUSW Participation Model



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## Democracy and Participation

that reported to the Union hierarchy now become elected Stewards that collaborate with other Stewards and members when seeking resolution to issues. Elected representatives at all levels of the Union become, to one degree or another, partners or coaches or facilitators.

The results of such a transformation leads to the development of more dynamic communication networks and a shared sense of the “big picture” by members of the organization. According to the research, an essential element of organizationally sponsored programs of Participation (CUSW Constitution) is a change in organizational member roles and corresponding changes in patterns of communication. Instead of looking to the Head of the Union for answers and direction, we look to each other. Role changes set the basis for a wide variety of other changes in micro processes that are associated with the move from a traditional to a participatory organization.

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has a role as a Member. All of the other roles within the Union, at the Workplace or in the Community are an extension of the role of Member.

Each Member takes ownership of their role and adopts the perspective of an owner. Information is made readily available and accessible. Interactive discussions about values and end-goals occur on a frequent basis.

These concepts are built into the CUSW structure. We have clearly identified roles. We have opened the doors to accessible information through the website. We have provided the Units and Committees with the supports that they need to have in order to have interactive discussions that set end-goals and direction. We have communication tools such as the Innovation Station to replace the Union Experts. Webpages and Portals are in place to encourage dialogue and assist in the definition of roles. What next?

- Connect with each other.

– Joe Mulhall