

Another “grassroots” initiative

Let's hope latest organizational review doesn't repeat "Futures" flop

As predicted a year ago, MPAC's "Partners in Excellence" program has spawned an "organizational review" whose stated goal is to make the company work better.

In a recent meeting with your union leadership team, MPAC acknowledged that past organizational change ("Futures") had caused problems that need to be fixed.

Management says there needs to be more "accountability" at MPAC (hard to disagree) and that it wants the organizational review done by someone with the "objectivity" to see what's really going on. Accordingly, MPAC has hired the consulting firm KPMG to conduct the review.

Union members on the Union-Management Committee (UMC) managed to get a meeting with the consulting firm last Friday.

KPMG shared its top 12 observations about MPAC with the union, and the union team responded with its own observations about what's wrong with the organization.

"KPMG clearly understands that there is something wrong with MPAC," says union team chair Ivan Herrington. "They are now going to put together some organizational models and go over them with everyone who offered input into the review before deciding which model to propose."

Except for its meeting with the union, KPMG has spoken primarily with MPAC managers or employees chosen by managers.

Management is calling this a "grassroots" initiative, ironically echoing the phrase used by former MPAC boss Bob Richards almost a decade ago when he launched the re-organization that caused the current mess.

"The first step in solving a problem is recognizing that you have one, so the union team

welcomes the latest organizational review," says Herrington. "That being said, MPAC doesn't have to pay big bucks to KPMG to tell them how to fix this place – we're happy to tell them for free."

MPAC response to RFR avalanche may hint at a way forward

Property taxpayers filed 168,000 Requests for Reconsideration for the 2008 tax year. Over 70,000 of those RFRs came in an avalanche in the final month before the deadline for filing.

Part of MPAC's response to this avalanche may hint at a way forward.

1 MPAC is making a mistake by sending Property Inspectors to visit properties but not allowing them to discuss the RFR with the ratepayer. Property Inspectors are only allowed to collect data; Customer Service Reps make the decision on the RFR. The result? Frustrated ratepayers. It is clear that the person doing the inspection on an RFR and the person doing the re-assessment, if one is called for, should be the same person.

2 Another step MPAC is taking to handle the RFR workload is the correct one. MPAC is now getting OPSEU members in Property Assessor 3 jobs to help out with the RFRs that are normally reconsidered by Valuation Review Specialists.

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The employer is moving lower-paid PA3s into acting Valuation Review Specialist positions, with VRS pay. This is good – and it proves what the union has been saying all along: PA3s have the training and ability to do work that is at the (higher) VRS pay rate, so the two positions should be paid at that rate. (A union policy grievance on this issue is currently at arbitration.)

Paying PA3s and CSRs the same would give MPAC the flexibility to move people around to handle changing workloads on an ongoing basis.

This is the way it used to work, before Futures. But right now, under normal

circumstances, Property Values and Customer Service are separated in their silos and can't help each other out in a busy time.

“MPAC is structured in such a way that it can't respond with agility to the different phases of the assessment cycle,” says Ivan Herrington.

3 The operational silos that divide MPAC from itself have another bad side effect: They prevent adequate mentoring.

“While it's great that we have a Chief Learning Officer now, we're still lacking the day-to-day mentoring that we used to have in the regional offices,”

says Herrington. “Property assessment is a complex field, and much of it can only be learned by working under the guidance of a senior staff member or supervisor who knows the way things work.

“For on-the-job training to really work, we need to bring people together again.”

While fixing MPAC by putting things back the way they used to be may not be in tune with the latest management fad, Herrington says good old-fashioned, accountable, roll-up-your-sleeves management never goes out of style.

“Why can't we have a property assessment system where the people doing the assessments are the people working with the ratepayers and tax collectors?

“Why can't we have a system where experienced staff are right there with new staff to teach them the ropes?

“Why can't we have a system where people feel they're all on the same team, and are happy to move to where they are needed depending on what's needed at the time?

“Why can't we have a system where we are directly accountable to the Minister of Finance?

“This organizational review is a great opportunity for MPAC to turn itself around. Hopefully management is not too proud to eat a slice of humble pie, acknowledge its mistakes, and listen to the frontline workers who want MPAC to work.”

Celebrate your union!

Aug. 10, 2009 is a big day.

It's the 10th anniversary of MPAC staff re-joining OPSEU after property assessment services were downloaded from the Ontario Ministry of Finance to what was then called the Ontario Property Assessment Corporation.

“The last 10 years have been stormy ones for MPAC staff, but your union has been a voice in the workplace and a hardworking fighter for the

rights of members,” says OPSEU president Warren (Smokey) Thomas. “I think you'd be hard pressed to find any member at MPAC who is not glad that OPSEU is in their corner.

“Congratulations on 10 years of union action.”

OPSEU reps on the Union-Management Committee invite members in every office to organize a 10th anniversary lunch on Monday, Aug. 10. Be sure to take pictures and forward them to your UMC rep!

“Thank God we didn't listen to the employer when they said we didn't need a union,” says Ivan Herrington. “Can you imagine working at MPAC without one?”



OPSEU President
Warren (Smokey)
Thomas

Start thinking about bargaining...

Collective agreement expires Dec. 31, 2009

The OPSEU collective agreement at MPAC expires Dec. 31, 2009, and a lot of members are already asking about bargaining. Some are even talking to union members on the Union-Management Committee (UMC) about what our bargaining goals should be.

Now is definitely the time to be thinking about bargaining, but the current team has no mandate to talk about the next round. Here's what needs to happen before bargaining can begin:

- **Pre-bargaining conference.** This meeting, tentatively set for Sept. 19, is where the new bargaining team will be elected.
- **Local demand-setting.** Locals are expected to be completing the local demand-setting survey of members and holding local demand-setting meetings in October.
- **Final demand-setting meeting.** The final (province-wide) demand-setting meeting is currently slated for the final day of the Broader Public Service conference, i.e., Nov. 27.

Bargaining should start soon after.

... but use MPAC vehicles for work purposes only!

Management has yet to use the Global Positioning Systems on MPAC vehicles to discipline employees, but it's probably just a matter of time.

Managers are asking OPSEU members why they are speeding, idling, moving cars outside of working hours, and

taking vehicles home at night. Do yourself a favour: Don't do any of these things. Use your MPAC car for work, and work only.



Keep in touch!

To ensure a speedy response to your questions, your leadership team has divided up all MPAC offices in the province. If you have a question or a comment, please contact the member responsible for your office. Contact us by e-mail at work or at home, as follows:

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