

NEW

Directions

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Working and engaging in a *stewardship culture*



Karen Levy photos

*Deputy minister thanks and commends staff
for the work they have done to bring the ministry
to this point of its transition.*

The ministry is just over halfway through its restructuring, Deputy Minister Ron Sapsford told senior managers at a one-day leadership conference in Toronto on Feb. 14.

"I like to think we're moving into the last part of the transformation. We're over most of the major structural pieces and we're now on to the changes that are required to the business process," Sapsford told 200 senior managers at the session entitled Stewardship: Engaging the MOHLTC Community.

He thanked and commended staff for the work they have done to bring the ministry to this point of its transition. "Go back 18 months and think where we were and all the changes that we've gone through," Sapsford said. "We've still managed to support the government of the day, while at the same time manage through the changes that the ministry is going through. I am very proud of how well we have done so far."

However, Sapsford cautioned: We're not out of the woods yet because we're at that halfway point where the heavy lifting begins. "I often hear, 'This isn't working the way I thought it would work,'" he said. "We need to address these sorts of sentiments without losing sight of the fact that we are continuing to move forward."

The deputy minister acknowledged that he did not have a "recipe



book" in his back pocket laying out exactly how the ministry would fully evolve into a stewardship working environment. He strongly encouraged staff across the ministry to work with him to continue defining a common purpose, even at times in the face of ambiguity.

Sapsford stressed that engaging staff at all levels is essential for a new stewardship culture to take hold. Being involved in cross-functional teams will more and more become pivotal to the way staff works within the ministry. He explained that while there will be formal teams, he anticipates that most of the ministry work will be done through informal teams that will take shape throughout the ministry as staff members take the initiative and seek out others across divisions to accomplish their objectives.

Sapsford said he has heard concerns from staff, who have had

some initial experience working on teams in the new ministry structure, about the challenge of trying to focus on teamwork, while at the same time tending to other tasks requiring their attention. "Part of the solution lies in evaluating what we do and how we do it. What do we drop because it isn't forward looking and part of a stewardship organization."

The bottom-line is that teamwork will become a primary focal

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Managers roll up their sleeves and focus on stewardship workshops

During the one-day leadership forum, senior managers participated in two different activities intended to encourage small group discussions and generate ideas and issues that matter as the ministry continues with its stewardship transition.

During the morning session, facilitator Tom Hurley, an executive coach and strategist, asked participants to draw or map their perception of their place within the ministry's organizational structure. They were also asked to depict their vision of the current connections they have to people they engage with inside and outside the ministry. The aim of the exercise was to help participants see relationships and patterns within the organization more effectively.

Participants were grouped four to a table and were asked to share their pictorial representation of the ministry with their colleagues as a way of stimulating further discussion.

"The ministry is a large universe with many interconnections. The challenge is to make sure all of the connections dovetail," one participant commented during the mapping exercise.

During the afternoon session, managers were asked to take part in what is known as a World Café. It involved participants engaging in small group discussions at one table and then circulating to join in other conversations going on in the room. The process builds on and links issues of commonality throughout the room. The intention was that cross-pollination of ideas would unfold new insights.

Participants were asked to ponder questions such as how individual employees can support one another to fully embrace stewardship and work cross-functionally.

After one round of conversation, one table suggested the setting up of a stewardship clearing house or data base where information on good stewardship in action could be shared.

An evaluation of the conference will be sent out shortly to all participants. Their feedback combined with ideas captured during the day's discussions will direct how the ministry learns and works together in a stewardship organization, and plans for future learning programs and conferences. ■

Artist Sara Heppner-Waldston creates a graphic narrative at the senior leadership forum. Using colourful drawings, icons and key phrases, Heppner-Waldston produced illustrations in real-time that captured the discussions and presentations that occurred throughout the day. This visual map helped participants see the interrelationships of their thoughts and ideas as the meeting progressed.

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point in how work is done within the ministry, he said. "The teams are our work. This the way our future is designed in a stewardship organizational model."

The organization needs to be looked at as a place that engages and taps into the skills and talent of staff from a broad cross-section and various levels of the organization, Sapsford said. "This is fundamental to stewardship; it comes back to the concept of partnership."

The deputy minister said the way ahead requires ministry staff to develop a sense of a common purpose. He referred to the simple concepts that he has discussed previously during his series of tours, saying they were important because they will help guide the organization forward:

- We have joint accountability. "We've structured ourselves in such a way that the respective division can't say that it is somebody else's problem."
- We have the right to say no. "Staff need to be enabled to enter into conversations in an open and honest way."
- We don't abdicate. "People have to choose to engage in this process and not to sit back and wait to be told what to do."

During the ongoing transition process, Sapsford said, it also helps if one is willing to freely share information, not be too risk adverse or so quick to blame others when things go wrong.

He acknowledged that the transition involves a personal commitment on the behalf of staff and a huge change for our culture, but that this is "the direction that we are moving in."

"This is new for all of us and we have more to do. But we're well on the way," Sapsford told the group. "My final thought is let's move on and close the deal." ■

Conversations have the power to change organizations



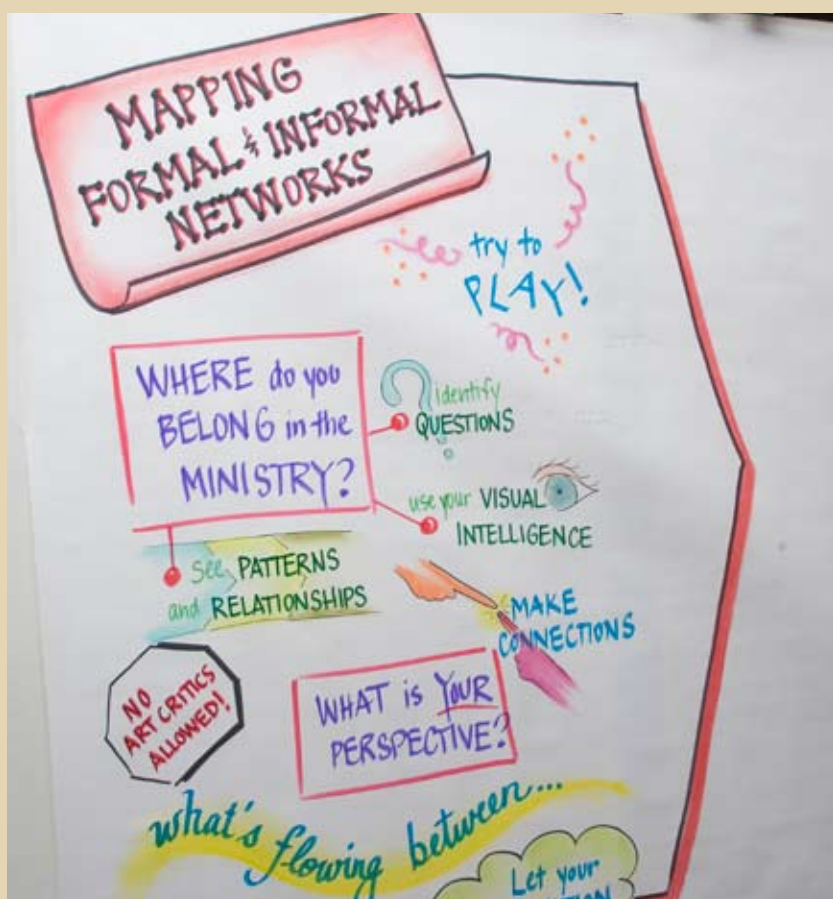
Facilitator Thomas Hurley listens intently as senior managers participate in a hands-on workshop intended to generate ideas about how ministry staff can better contribute to the creation of a stewardship working environment.

Conversations transform the culture of organizations. That was the main message facilitator Tom Hurley, a specialist in large scale systems change, delivered to ministry senior managers at the leadership forum.

The heart of embracing stewardship and working cross-functionally is understanding and mastering conversation as a core leadership process. Through how we talk with one another, who we invite into the conversation, and what we choose to focus on, we can create an organization that reflects our stewardship vision, Hurley explained.

For the ministry and its many stakeholders, conversation is the means for continually clarifying goals, for weaving and re-weaving connections, and for engaging participants throughout the community on key questions and critical issues.

From strategy development to policy implementation and from agreement on core values to engagement with stakeholders, conversation is the medium of connection, learning, process improvement, community building, and action.



Hurley introduced seven practical guidelines involved in putting the concept of conversation as a core leadership process into action.

1. Practice the art of hosting:

Hosting is about creating both physical and psychological space that is inviting, hospitable, and honoring of all who enter it.

2. Clarify the context for the conversation:

What's the larger context in which a particular conversation, meeting, or project has meaning?

3. Address questions that matter:

Questions that matter will relate directly to the purpose of the conversation and reflect awareness of context.

4. Seek diverse voices:

Take time to reflect on the dimensions of diversity that are important in relation to a program or project and be willing to engage a range of different voices in meaningful ways.

5. Design the rules of engagement:

- Specify desired outcomes
- Co-create key agreements
- Clarify roles and responsibilities
- Be explicit about accountability.

6. Trust in emergence:

Strategic plans provide a sense of direction, but finding the path from here to there on a week-to-week, month-to-month basis means continually sensing what is emerging — and using intuition, along with analysis, to guide choices about next steps.

7. Become a community that learns:

Consider what organizational infrastructures and practices will enable you to become a community that learns. What kinds of information and support would be useful to you? What can you contribute that is helpful to others?

As leaders in different parts of the organization come to see designing and hosting conversations a key part of their day-to-day stewardship work, webs of conversation emerge and start to connect across many different parts of an organization. ■