

Is the tide about to turn on workplace stress? The consequences of yesterday's truths

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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA



Why are we here?

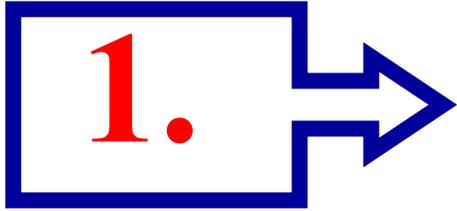
“To find and share strategic solutions to organizational stress.” Deb Jones

My contribution:

- Kick start this process by offering ideas, evidence, arguments
- Focus on **solutions**
- Instill a sense of **hope**

This morning I will focus on...

- ① Workplace stress reality check
- ② From 'the end of work' to overwork
- ③ Rays of hope in the knowledge economy
- ④ Restating the business case for action
- ⑤ Healthy organization strategies

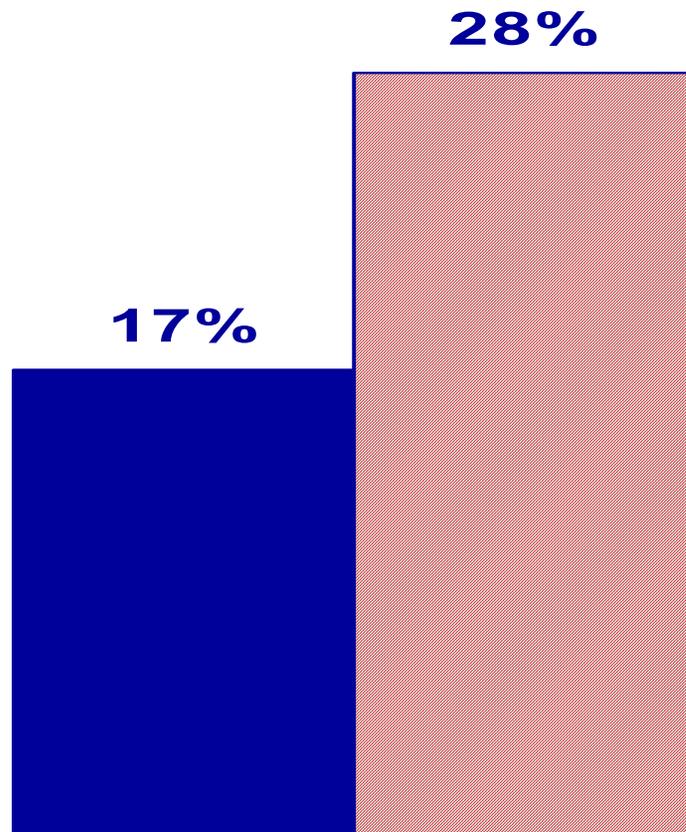


Stress reality check

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Stress at work

Percentage of workers reporting high job strain by gender and age group*, Canada, 1994/95



■ Men ■ Women

Job strain is a major stressor caused by:

- hectic jobs,
- conflicting demands,
- little control over pace of work or how to carry out duties

Stress and health

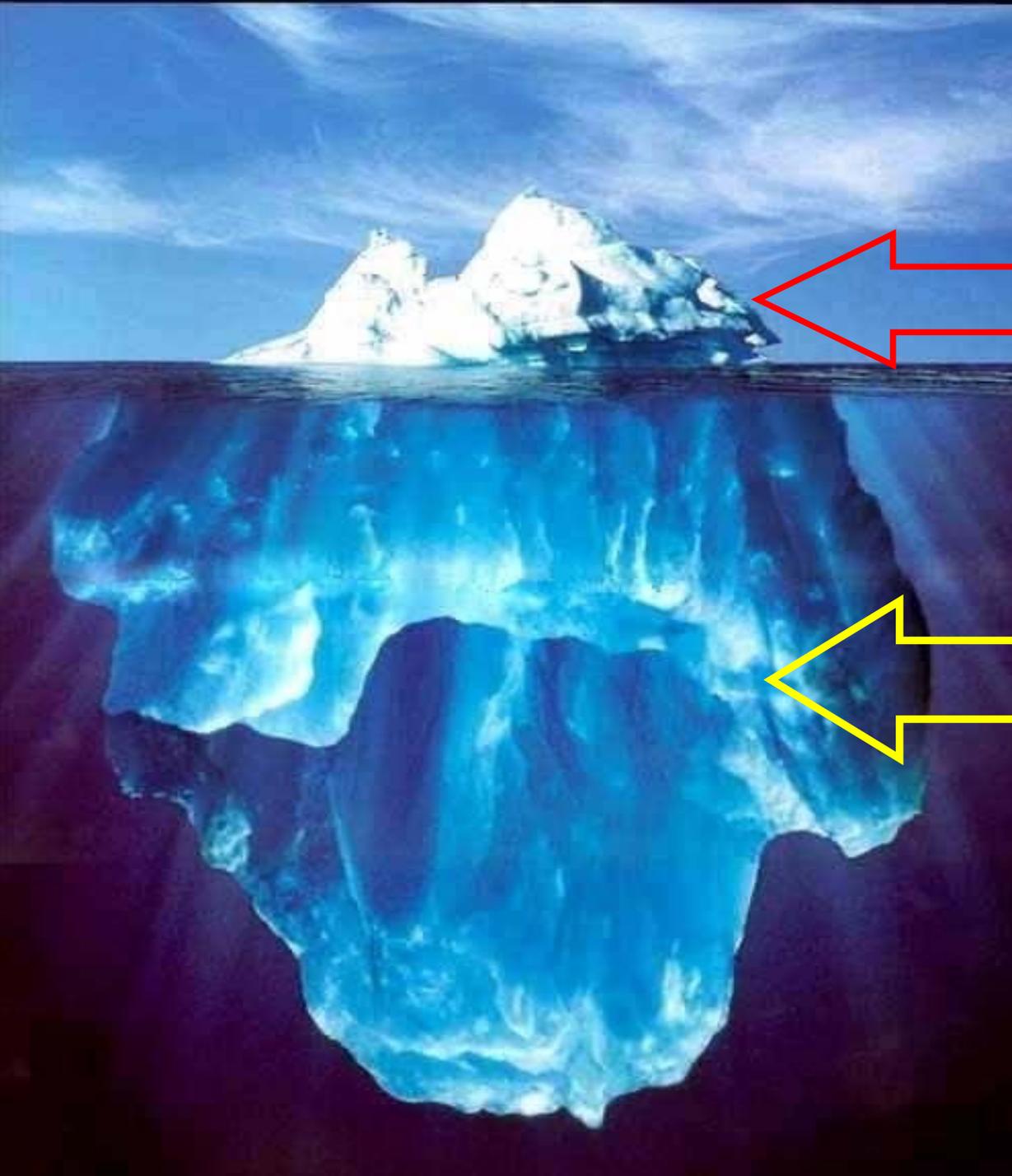
High job strain increases the probability of

- migraines
- psychological distress
- work injury
- depression and reduced health (over time)

Other work stressors:

- high physical demands
- low co-worker support
- high job insecurity
- low supervisory support

- *This research is only a starting point*
- *We need to dig deeper into changes in jobs, workplaces and the economy*



Absenteeism

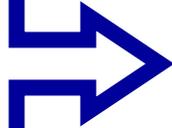
Turnover

High health benefit costs

Job dissatisfaction

**THE
WORK
ENVIRONMENT**

2.



Work intensification

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From the 'end of work' to overwork

- Remember Jeremy Rifkin's pessimistic scenario?
 - “...new, more sophisticated technologies are going to bring civilization ever closer to a new workerless world.”
 - The End of Work* (1995), p. xv.
- Rifkin was wrong!
- However, these 1990s job anxieties diverted attention from other important changes occurring
- Today, the 'knowledge-based economy' creates the opposite scenario
- Reality = overwork and looming labour shortages
- This is a highly polarized economy, so many still do not have enough work and job insecurity is a major stressor

Stress and work time pressures

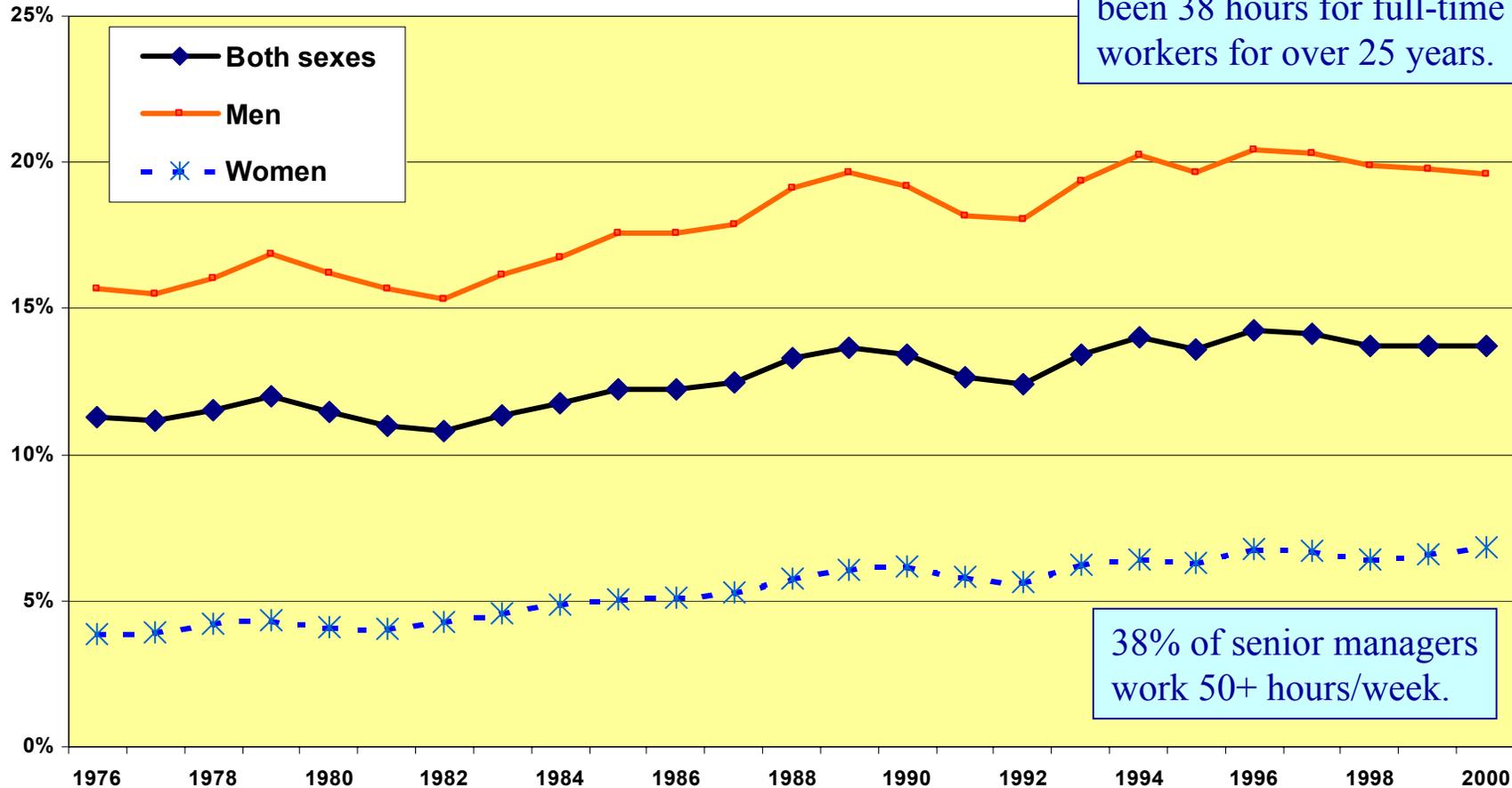
“Stress is killing workers and is costing employers and governments billions of dollars. Employees need more time away from the office, meaningful time off from work and no cell phones, laptops, e-mail or any other umbilical cord to work.”

Ryan Langlois in *Canadian HR Reporter*, 18 June 2001, p. G1.

What’s the underlying problem?

The rise in long work hours

Per cent of employed Canadians who work 50 or more hours per week, 1976 to 2000



Impact of rising work pressures

Work intensification:

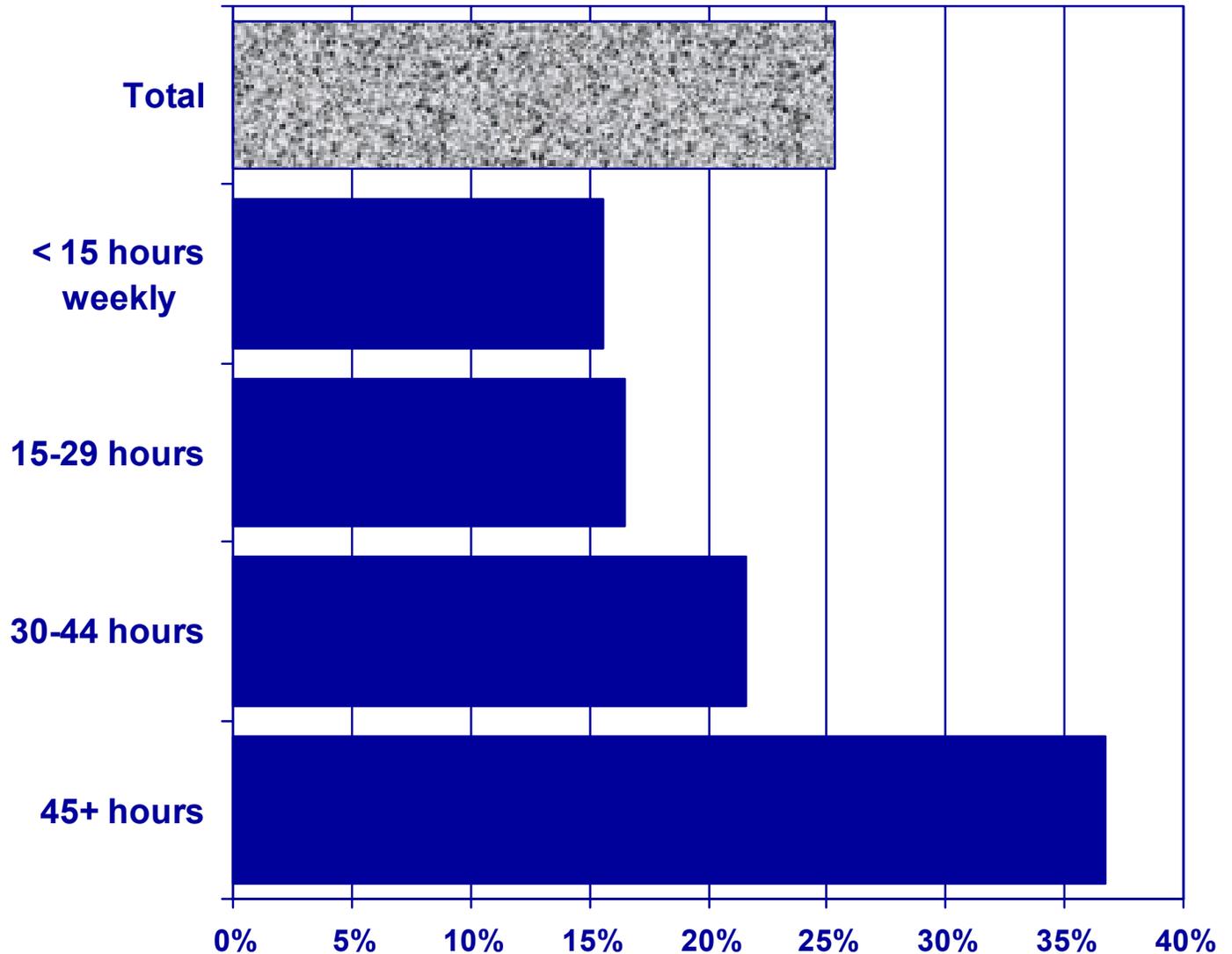
- ✓ *Long or 'non-standard' work hours, inflexible schedules, rising workloads and performance expectations*
- ✓ *The employment contract has been redefined: 110% effort*

Consequences for:

- health
- health care costs
- work-life balance
- absenteeism, turnover
- morale, commitment
- learning and skills

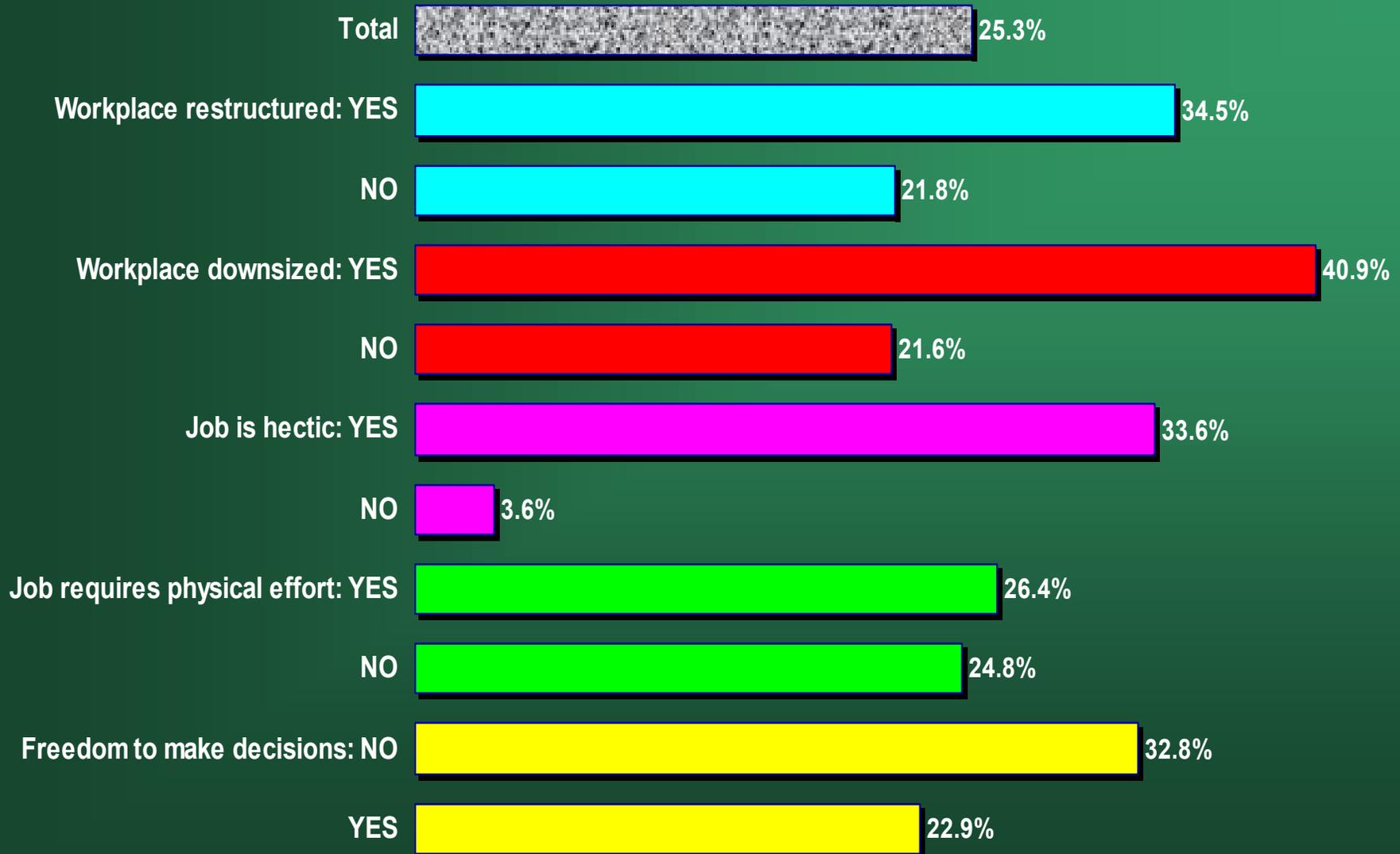
What ever happened to the 'leisure society'?

Percentage of workers strongly agreeing that their job is very stressful, by work hours, Canada, 2000



Source: CPRN-Ekos Changing Employment Relationships Survey 2000 (n=2500).

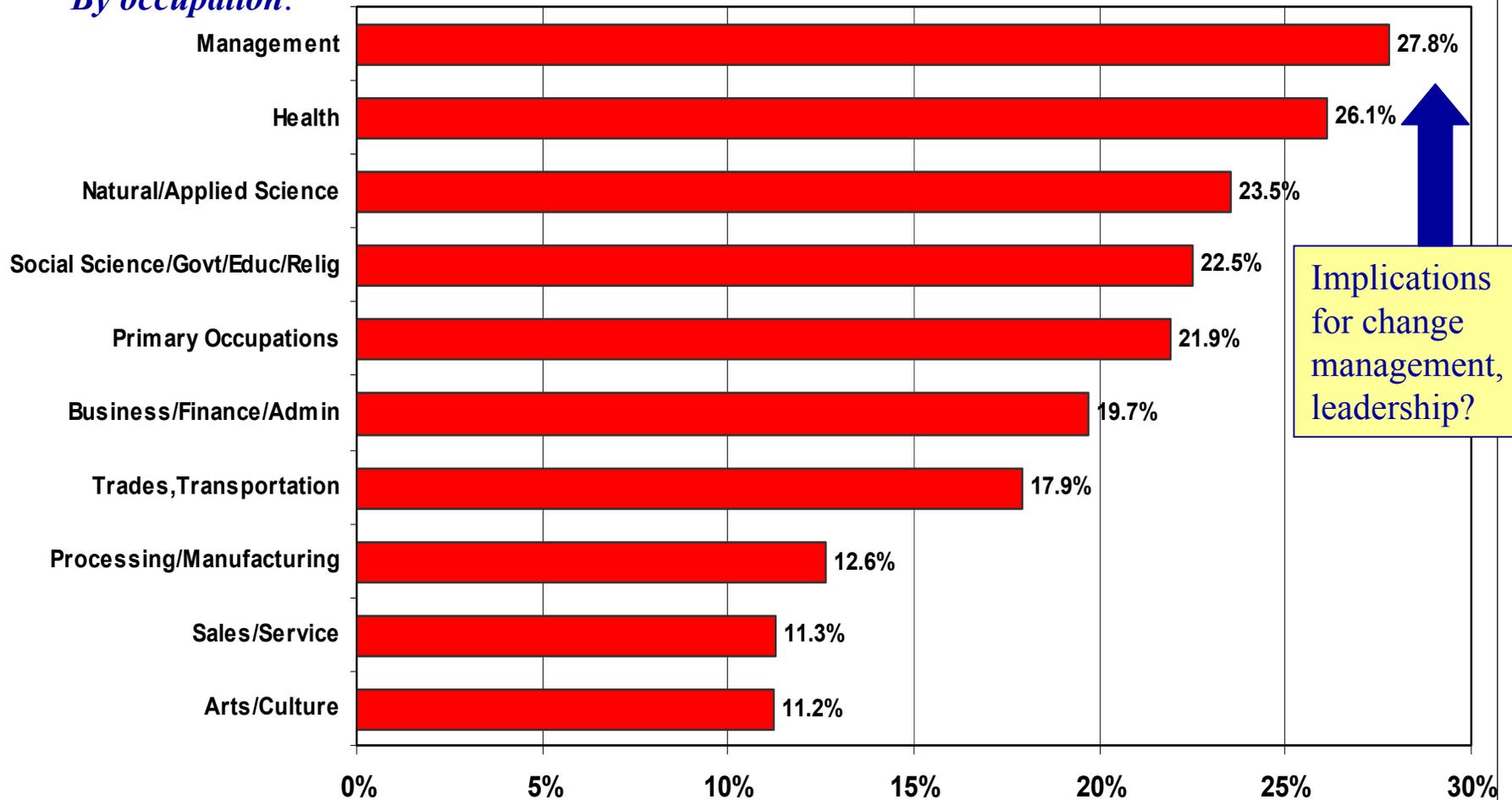
Percentage of workers strongly agreeing that their job is very stressful, by organizational and job characteristics, Canada, 2000



Work Overload

% who often or always have difficulty keeping up with the workload

By occupation:



Implications for change management, leadership?

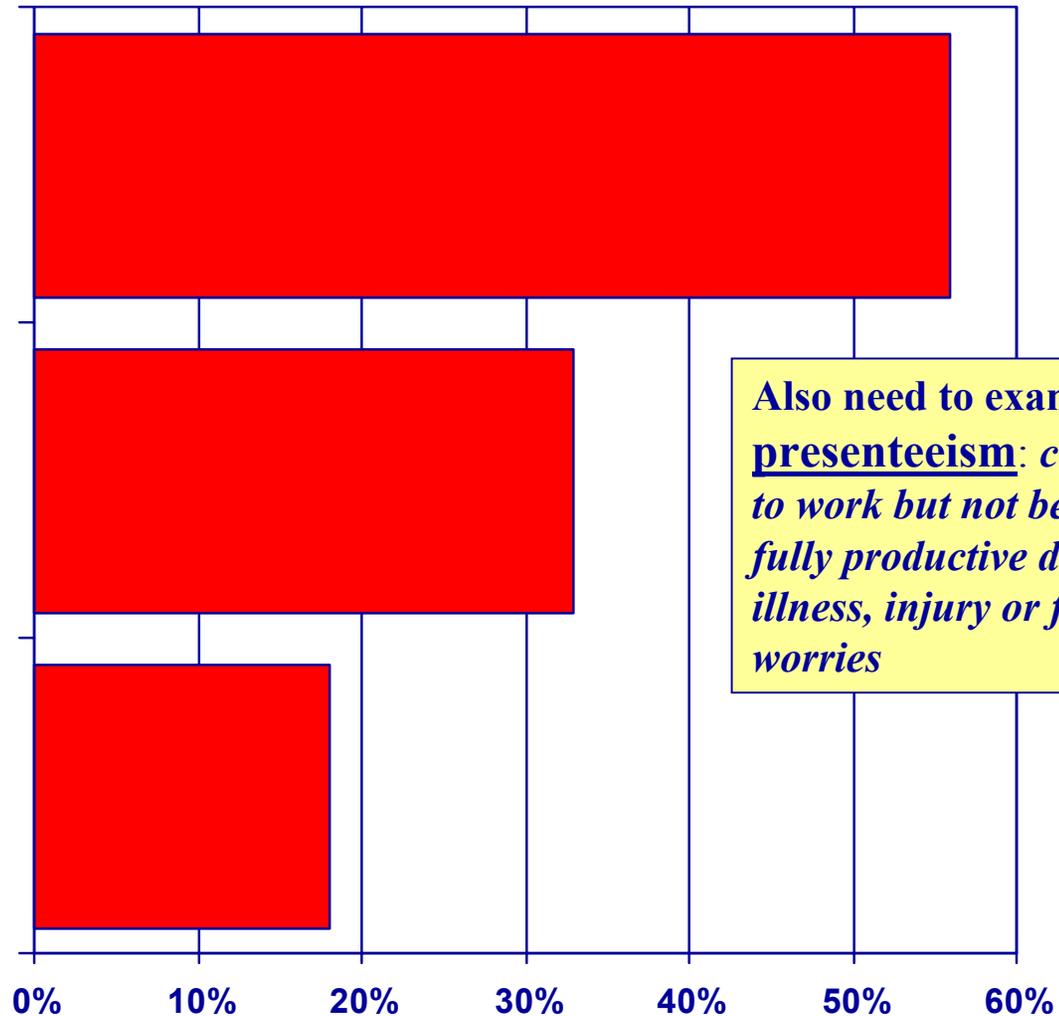
Workload and stress-related absences

Workload:

Too much to handle

Hard to keep up

Right amount

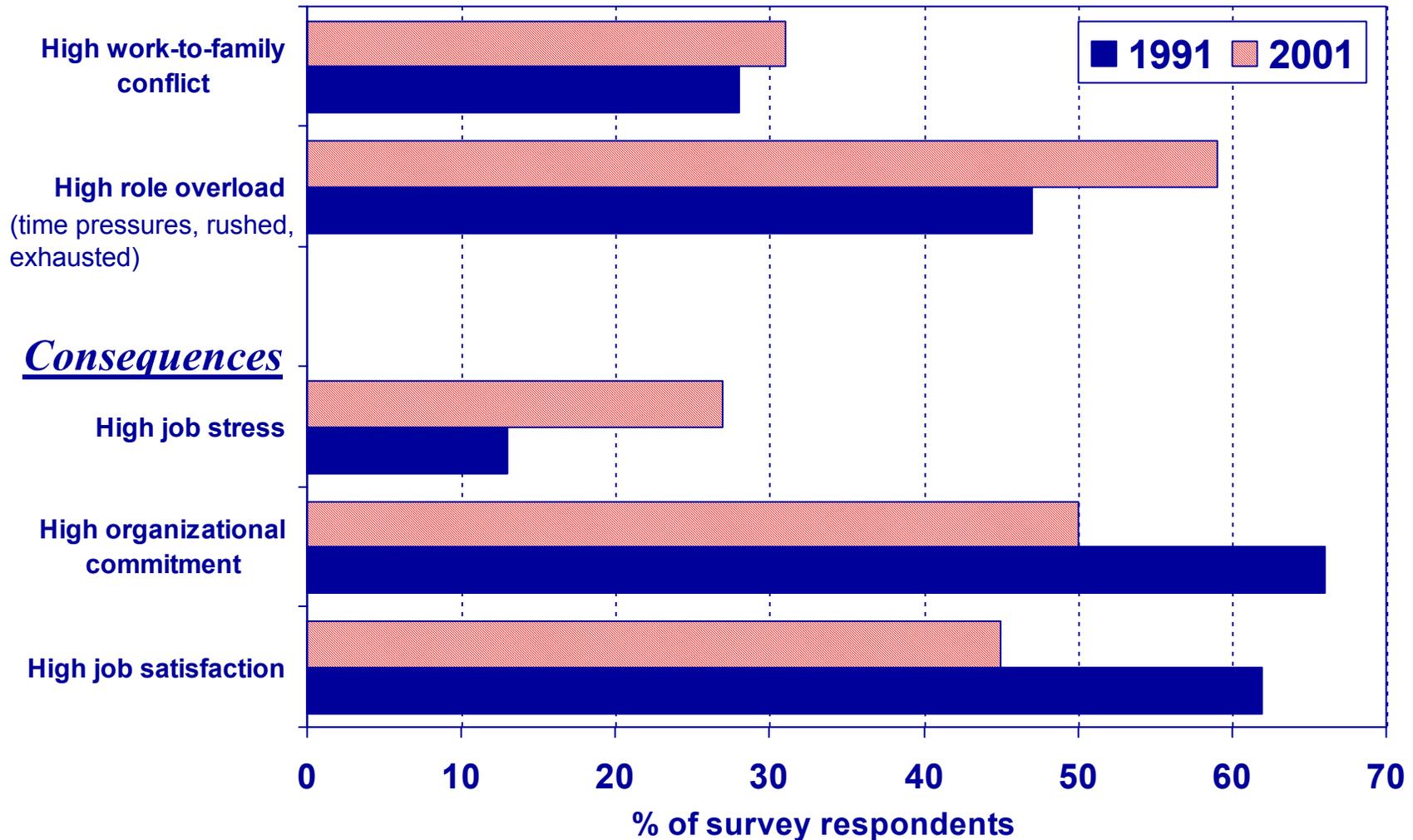


Also need to examine presenteeism: *coming to work but not being fully productive due to illness, injury or family worries*

Percent absent due to stress in past year

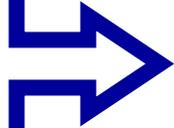
Rising work - family conflict

Work-family balance



Source: L. Duxbury and C. Higgins, *Work - Life Balance in the New Millennium* (CPRN Discussion Paper, October 2001. www.cprn.org)

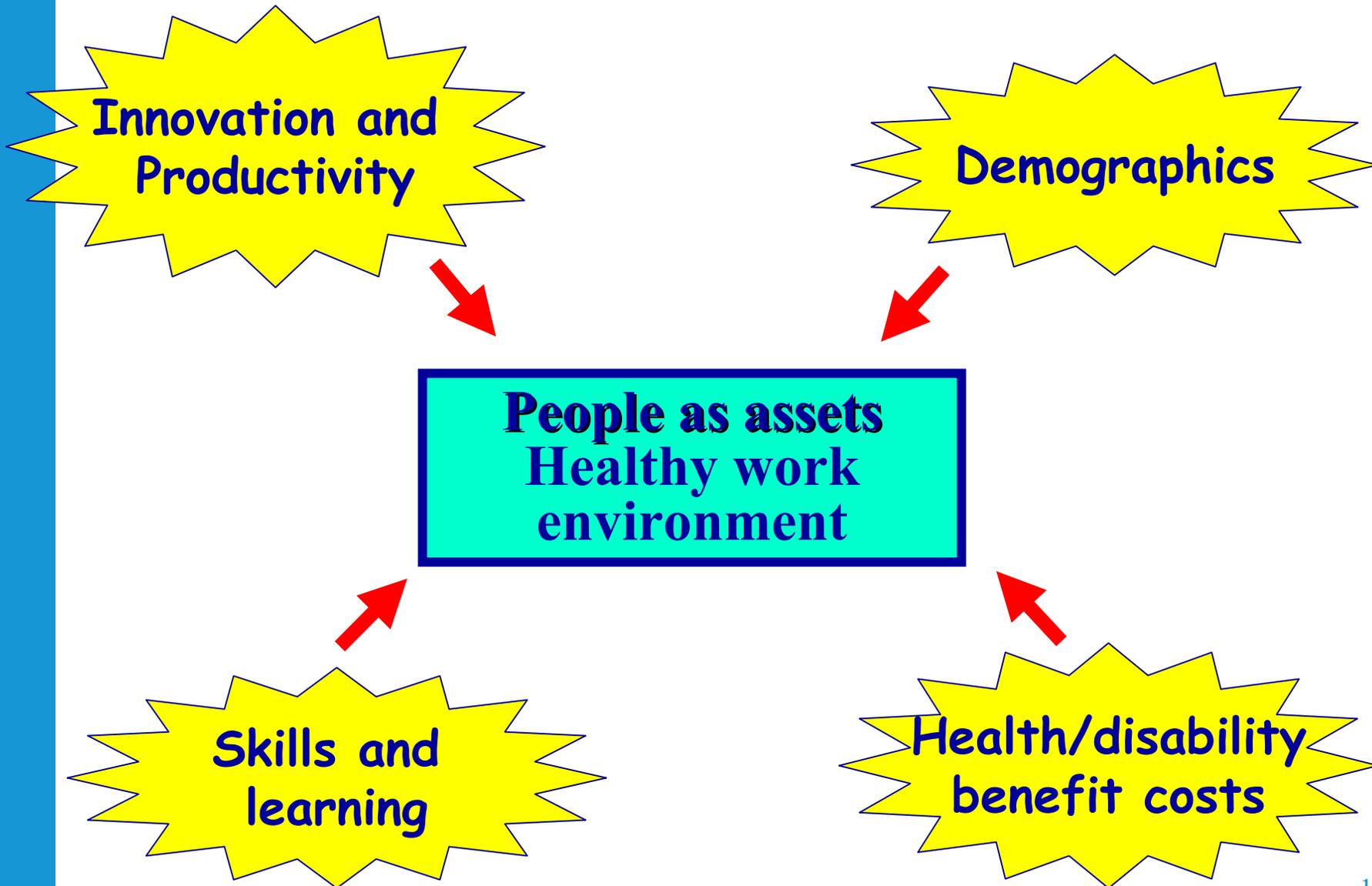
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Rays of hope in the knowledge economy

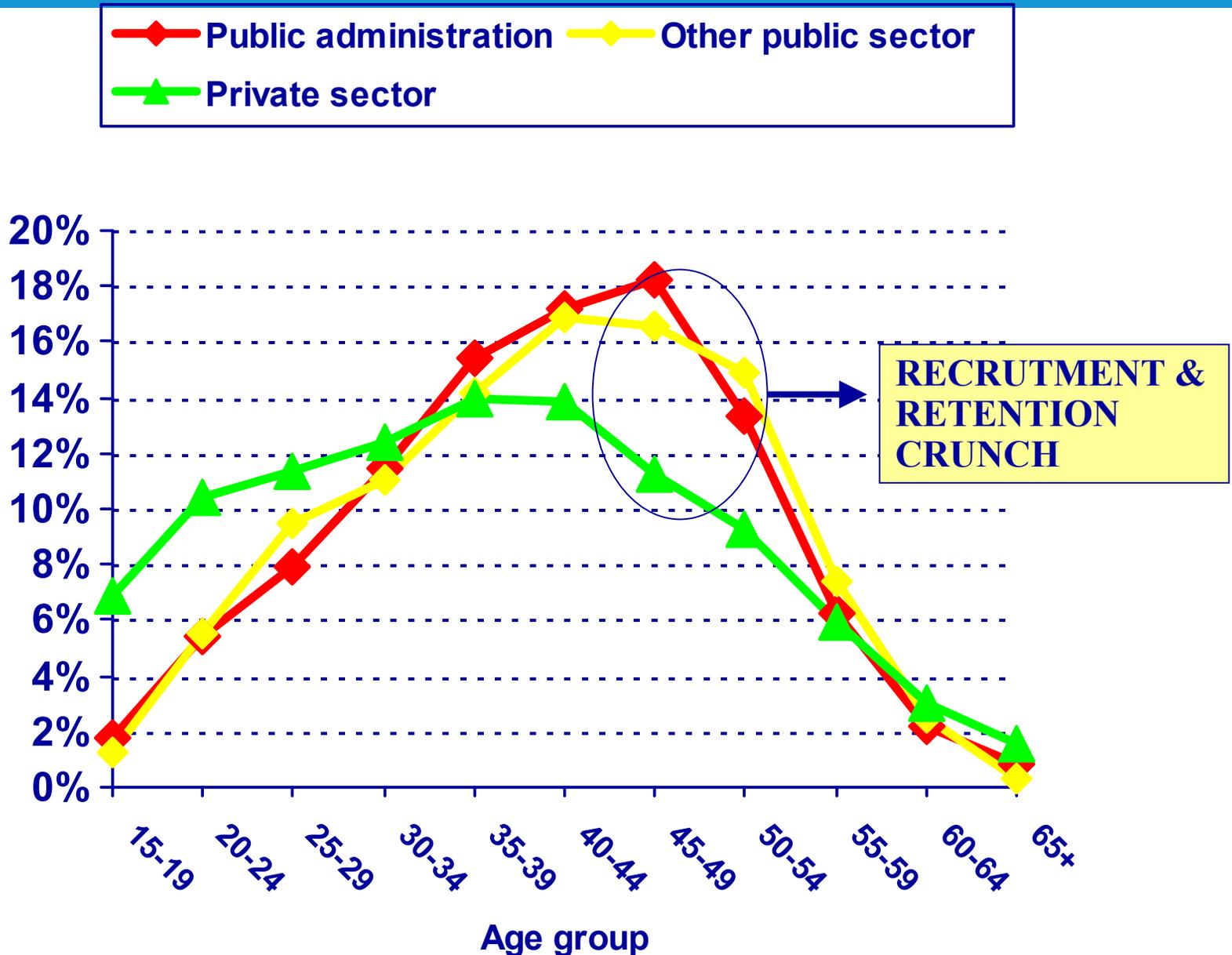
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Pressures to create healthier work environments



Is your organization prepared for the demographic crunch?

Age composition of labour force by sector, Canada, 2000



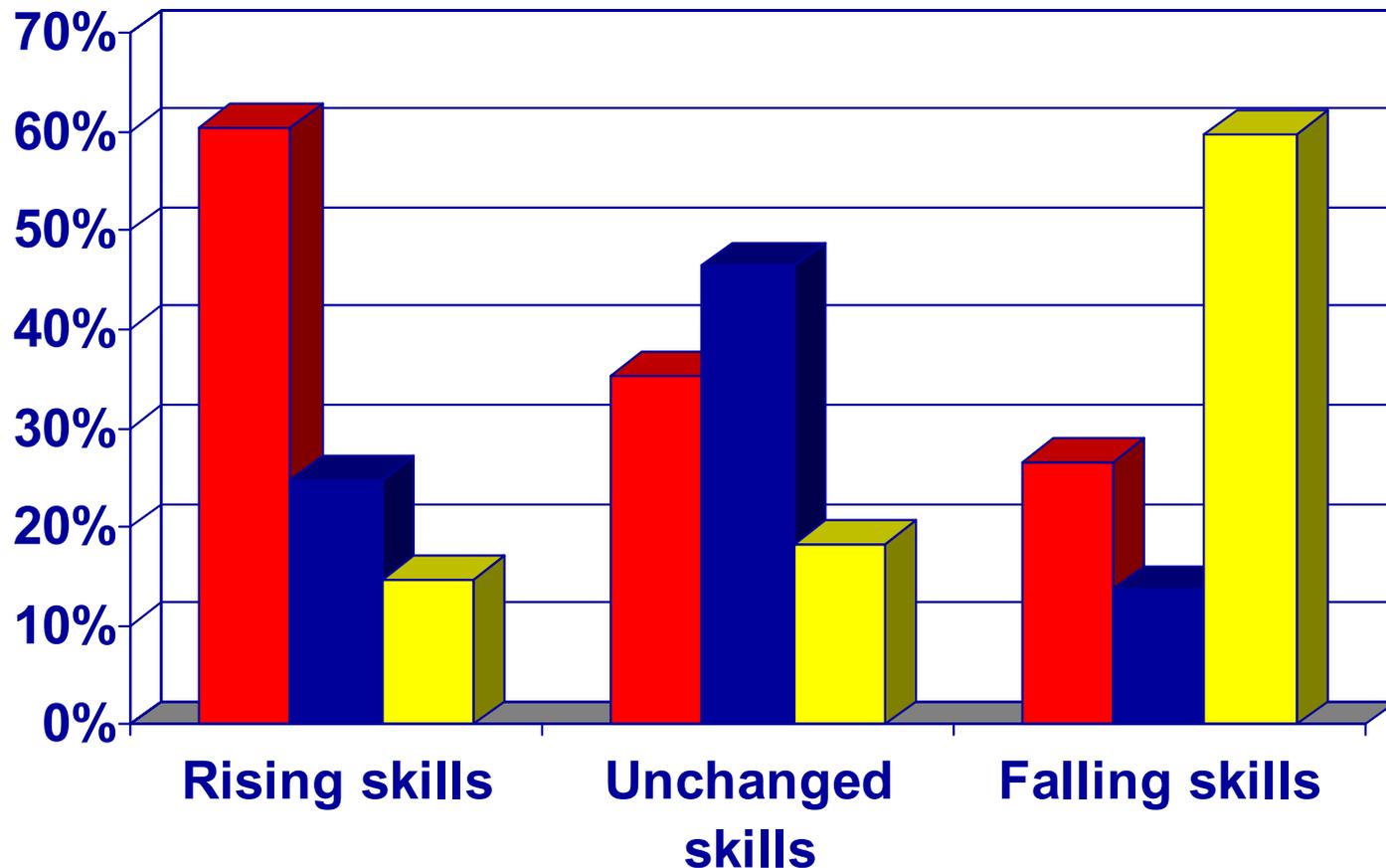
Stress and the 'Creative Class'

- Focus on the key economic role of 'symbolic analysts' or knowledge workers (managers, professionals, technicians)
- Richard Florida calls these workers 'the creative class', who comprise 30% of the US workforce (*The Creative Class*, 2002)
- The creative class feels more rushed, time-impooverished and stressed than other groups
- Made worse by these workers perceiving that their time is increasingly valuable
- Many creative workers have flexible schedules
- Information and communication technology enables them to take their work everywhere

Stresses of a knowledge economy

Change in stress at work over previous 5 years, Britain, 2001

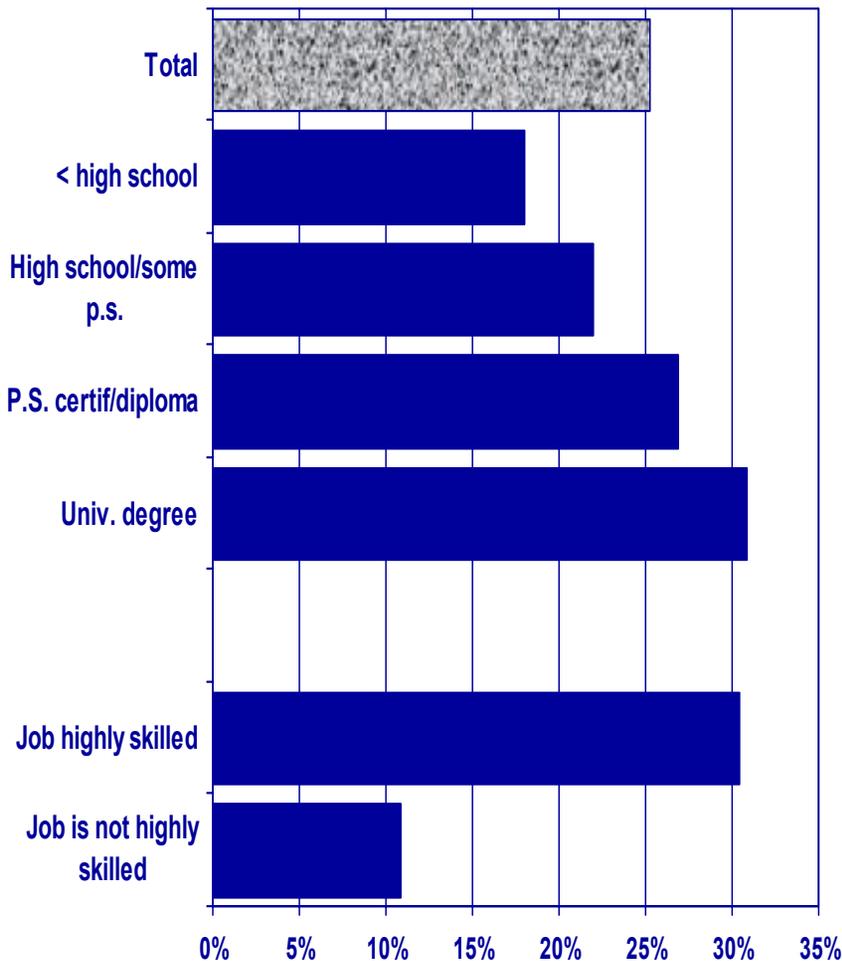
■ Increase in stress ■ No change ■ Decline in stress



Data from 2001 Skills Survey, representative sample of 4470 paid workers between ages of 20 and 60.
Source: F. Green and D. Gallie, "High skills And high anxiety: skills, hard work and mental well-being."
SKOPE research paper No. 27, University of Warwick, Spring 2002.

Knowledge workers and stress

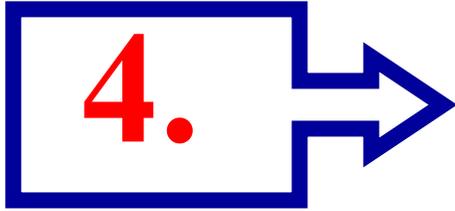
Job stress by education and skills



Percent of workers strongly agreeing that their job is very stressful

Source: CPRN-Ekos Changing Employment Relationships Survey 2000 (n=2500).

- *Don Tapscott*: the digital economy is based on knowledge work and innovation, creating a convergence between work and learning
- *Peter Drucker*: knowledge workers must be treated as assets, not costs. Their work must enable continuous innovation, learning and teaching
- **Problem**: knowledge work occurs in organizational contexts that undermine these goals



Restating the 'business case' for action

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Linking healthy work and innovation

- We must clearly link the corporate and policy agenda of **innovation** with **healthy workplace** goals
- The federal government's innovation strategy claims that “(k)nowledge is the main source of competitive advantage, and it is people who embody, create, develop and apply it”. *Achieving Excellence: Investing in People, Knowledge and Opportunity. Canada's Innovation Strategy*. Industry Canada 2002 [www.innovationstrategy.gc.ca]
- Healthy work environments contribute to Canada's economic success by creating the conditions in which creativity and skills flourish

Learning organizations = healthy workplaces

- **Lots of pressure to make better use of existing talent**
- **So need to create enabling conditions for the continuous use and development of skills**
 - ***a healthy and supportive work environment***
- **The human resource management practices and organizational contexts that support learning also define a healthy workplace**
- **All workers can be ‘knowledge workers’ if given continuous learning opportunities**

Statistics Canada reports that being too busy at work is the most common reason cited by those facing barriers to job-related training in 1997 (by 42%). *Perspectives on Labour and Income* (Summer 2002).

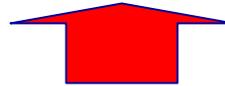
What influences employees' perceptions of a healthy work environment?

- ***Most positive influences***: workplace social relations (communication, co-workers, supervisor, recognition)
 - These enable and support a healthy work environment
- ***Positive influences***: adequate resources (tools, equipment, information, training, feedback and guidelines)
- ***Negative influences***: job demands (stressful, hectic, heavy workload, conflicting demands)
- ***OUTCOMES***: Employees who perceived their work environments as “healthy” had higher job satisfaction, commitment and morale, and lower absenteeism and intent to quit

Convergent thinking on what needs to change

- Comprehensive
- Multi-disciplinary
- Evidence-based
- Human capital investments
- Long-term view

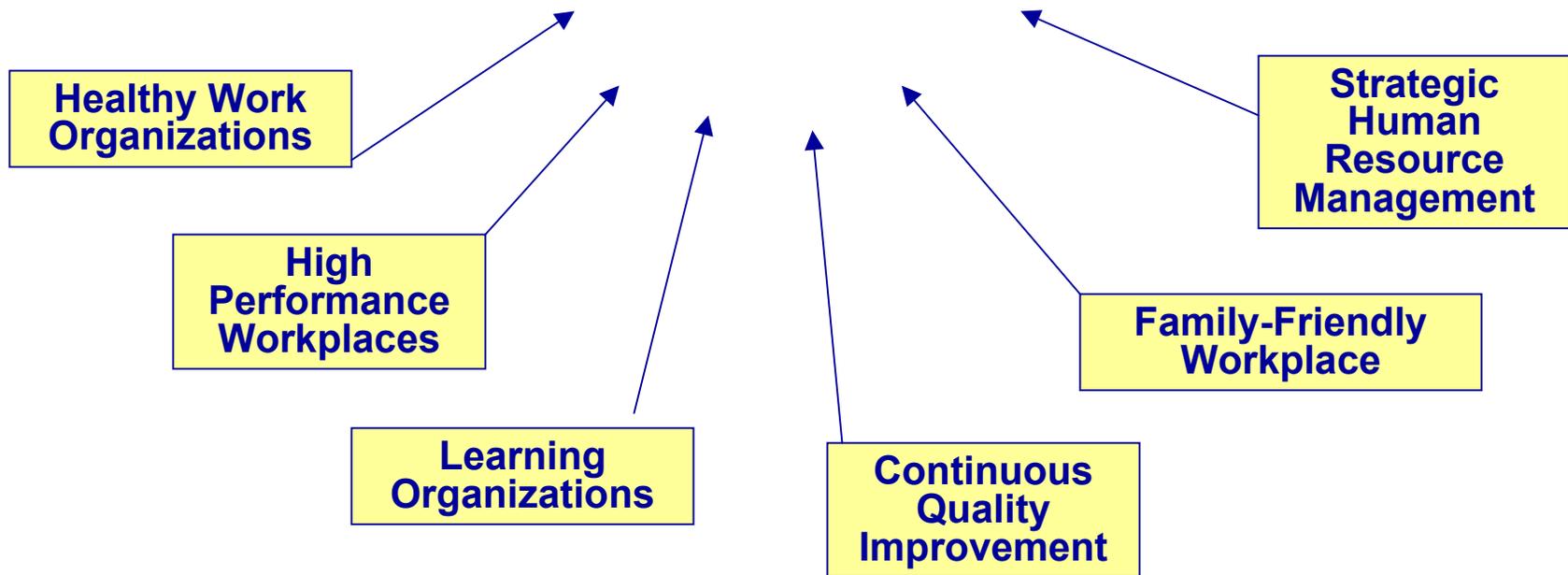
RESULTS

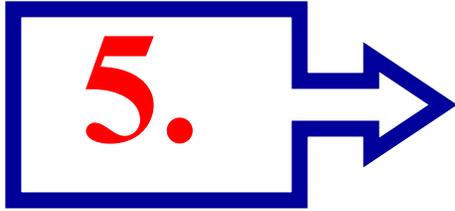


**High quality work environment:
A Great Place to Work**

EXAMPLES:

- VanCity
- Bank of Montreal
- Clestica
- MDS Nordion
- Daimler-Chrysler
- ?????????





Change strategies

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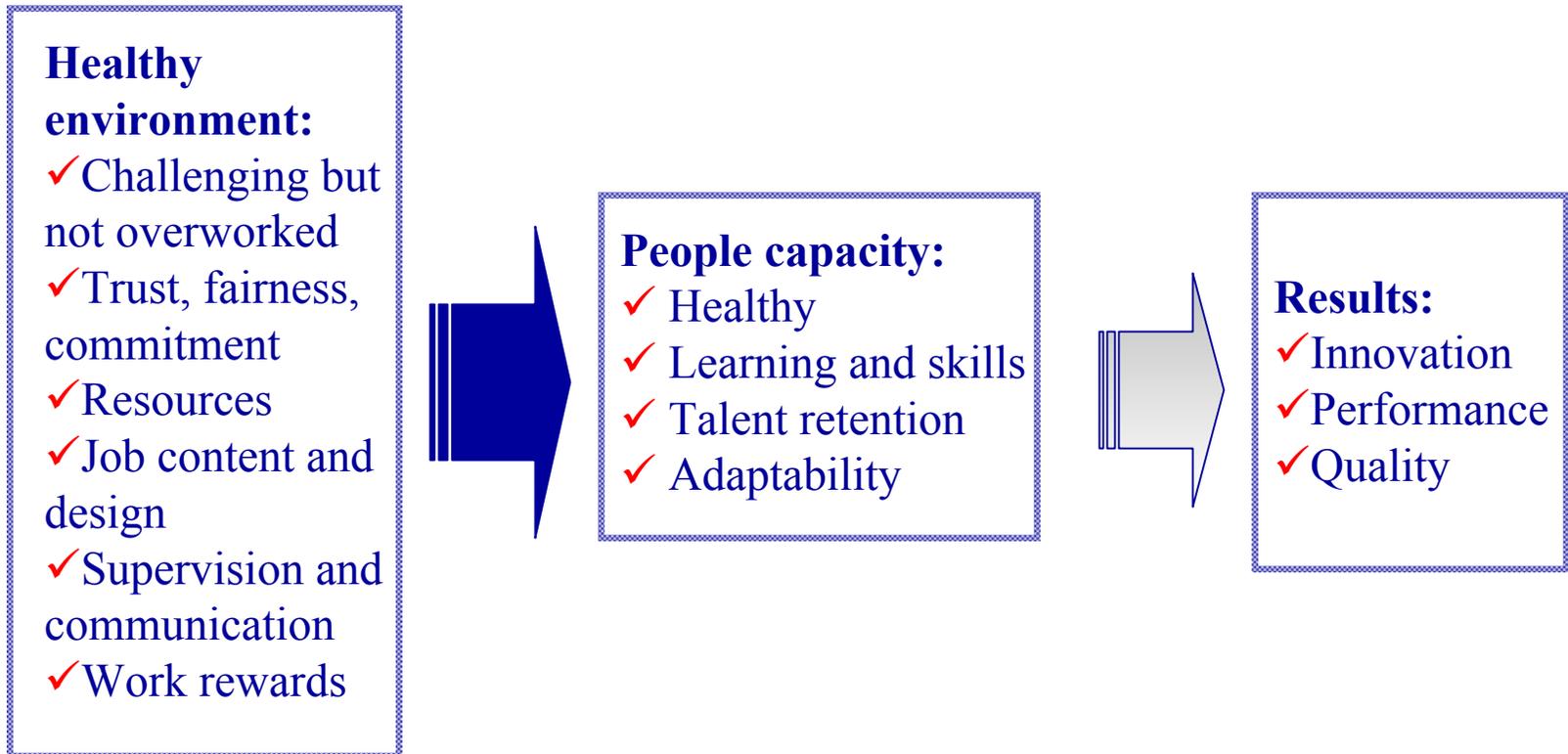
The Healthy Organization

- This model links improved health outcomes for employees and improved organizational performance
- Balances customer expectations, organizational goals, employee skills and health needs
- This requires collaboration of health promotion, HR, OHS and OD professionals
- Addresses individual health risk factors and workplace contexts

**See: U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. *The Changing Organization of Work and the Safety and Health of Working People*. 2002.
www.cdc.gov/niosh**

The logic of a healthy organization

Here's how a healthy work environment, people capacity, and improve results are linked:



Health and corporate social responsibility

- The European Union wants “health at work” to be part of a corporate social responsibility framework
 - firms adopt voluntary “good practices” that exceed legislated requirements
 - integrate health at work into a European employment strategy
 - link promotion of quality employment with full use of human productive potential

See: Adapting to change in work and society: a new Community Strategy on health and safety at work 2002-6. Commission of European Communities, March 2002.

Creating healthy organizations needs transformational change

Ingredients of successful change:

- 1. Urgency**
- 2. Vision**
- 3. Coalitions**
- 4. Communication**
- 5. Participation**
- 6. Early wins**
- 7. Institutionalize**

- “If there is one clear result from the research on change management, it is that employee participation increases individual ownership and excitement and, in turn, decreases individual resistance to change. The more people are involved, the more the change effort is their change effort. The more individuals can see that they can succeed in the future state, the more empowered they feel.”

M. Tushman, and C.A. O'Reilly III.
1997. *Winning Through Innovation : a Practical Guide to Leading Organizational Change and Renewal*.
Harvard Business School Press, p. 200.

You are the change champions

ACTION QUESTIONS...

- What is your vision of “a healthy organization”?
- How does this vision contribute to your organization’s strategic goals?
- What opportunities exist now to make this vision a reality?

For additional information visit these
websites:

www.arts.ualberta.ca/glowe

www.cprn.org

www.jobquality.ca

e-mail: graham.lowe@ualberta.ca