

Identifying the Building Blocks of a Healthy Health Care Work Environment

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Three key questions...

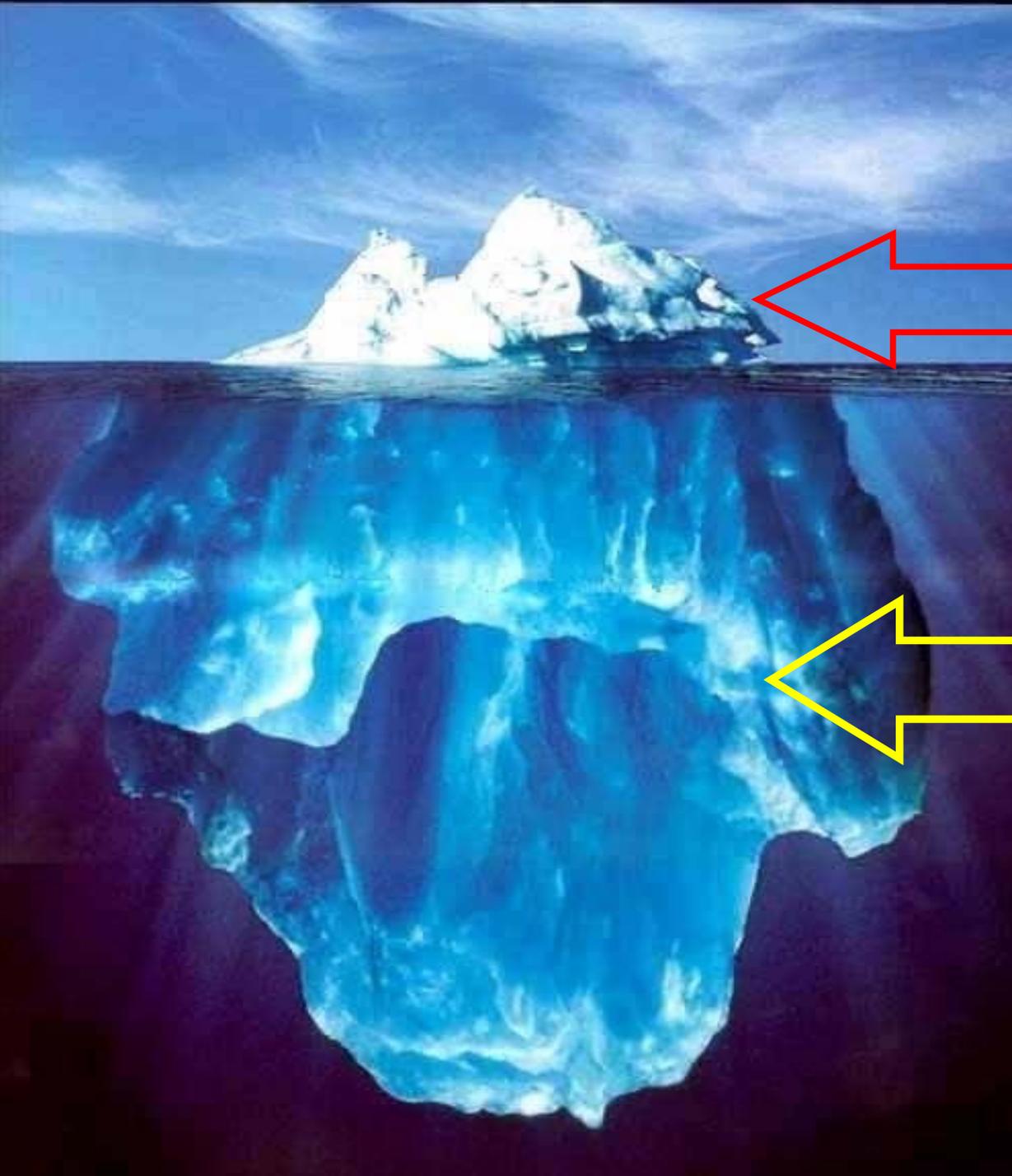
- ✓ **What are the building blocks of high quality of work environments?**
- ✓ **How does a high quality work environment benefit employees, employers and clients?**
- ✓ **What practical lessons and guiding principles for action does the research offer?**

1.



Why focus on the
work environment?

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Recruitment
Retention
Development
Engagement

**THE
WORK
ENVIRONMENT**

The work environment is the key to organizational renewal

**20TH
Century
traditional
health care
organization**

**Work Environment
Barriers and
Enablers to
Change:**

- Leadership
- Culture
- People practices
- Employment relationships
- Rewards and resources
- Work design and demands

**21st Century
model of
high quality
health care
organization**

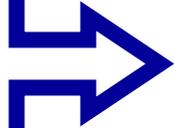
What matters for workers...

- At numerous workshops and talks, workers tell me that a good workplace depends on:
 - Contribution
 - Development
 - People
 - Values and culture
 - Workload
 - Communication
 - Rewards

Research backs this up

- **When asked what they considered important in a job, Canadian workers give high priority to:**
 - **Respect**
 - **Interesting work**
 - **Good communication**
 - **Sense of accomplishment**
 - **Work-family balance**
 - **Develop skills and abilities**
- **Work environments impact all these factors**
- **Not meeting these expectations costs employers**

2.



Barriers to
improving the
work environment

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Work intensification

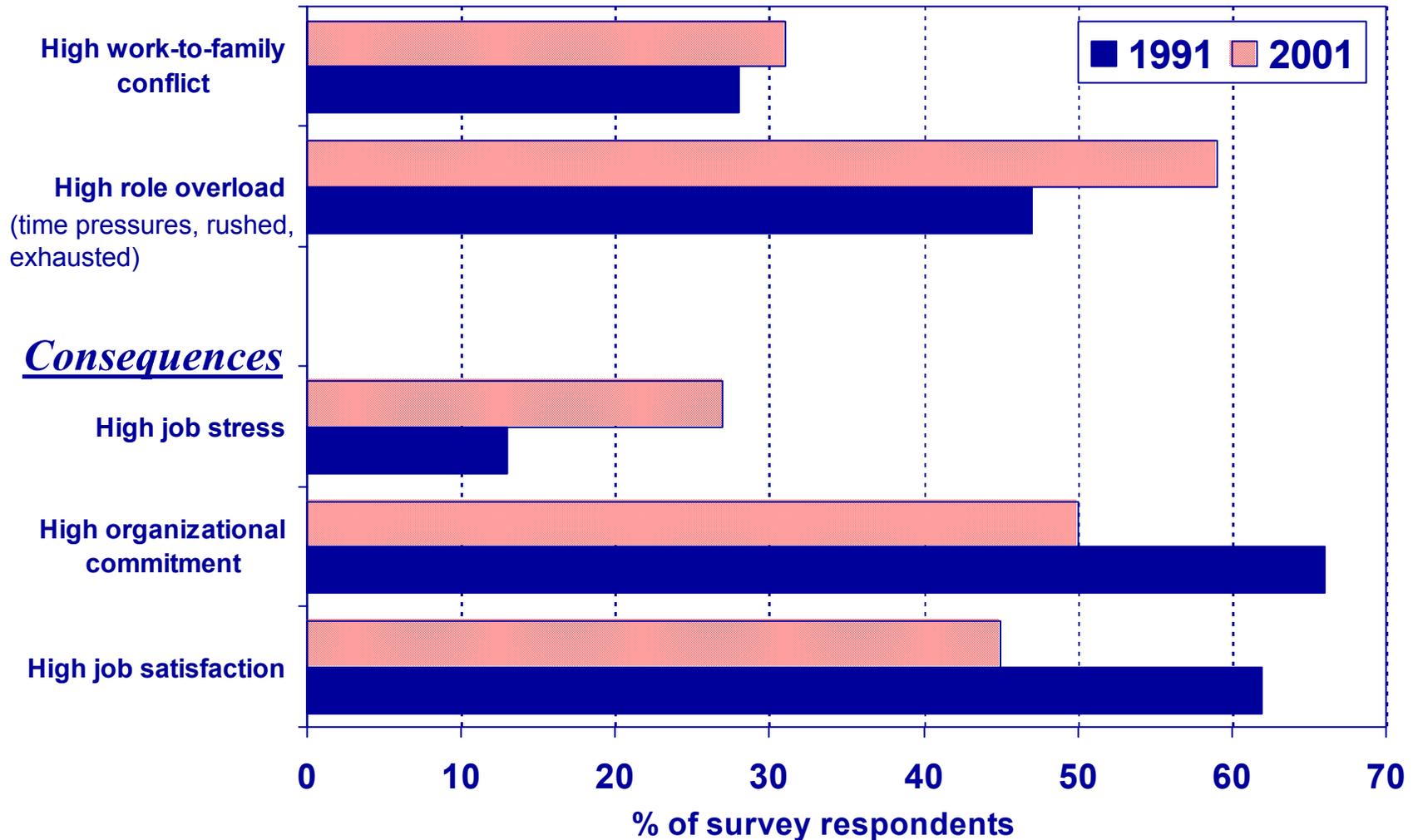
- ✓ Long or 'non-standard' work hours, inflexible schedules, rising workloads and performance expectations
- ✓ The employment contract has been redefined: 110% effort
- ✓ Work pressures threaten organizational sustainability

This has consequences for...

- health
- productivity
- work-life balance
- absenteeism
- turnover
- morale
- learning and skills

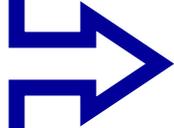
Rising work - family conflict

Work-family balance



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

3.



Employment
relationships
depend on the
work environment

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The importance of employment relationships

- **Four underlying dimensions of employment relationships:**
 - ✓ **trust**
 - ✓ **commitment**
 - ✓ **communication**
 - ✓ **influence**
- **These are key ingredients of a ‘good job’**

See: G. Lowe and G. Schellenberg, *What's A Good Job? The Importance of Employment Relationships* (www.cprn.org)

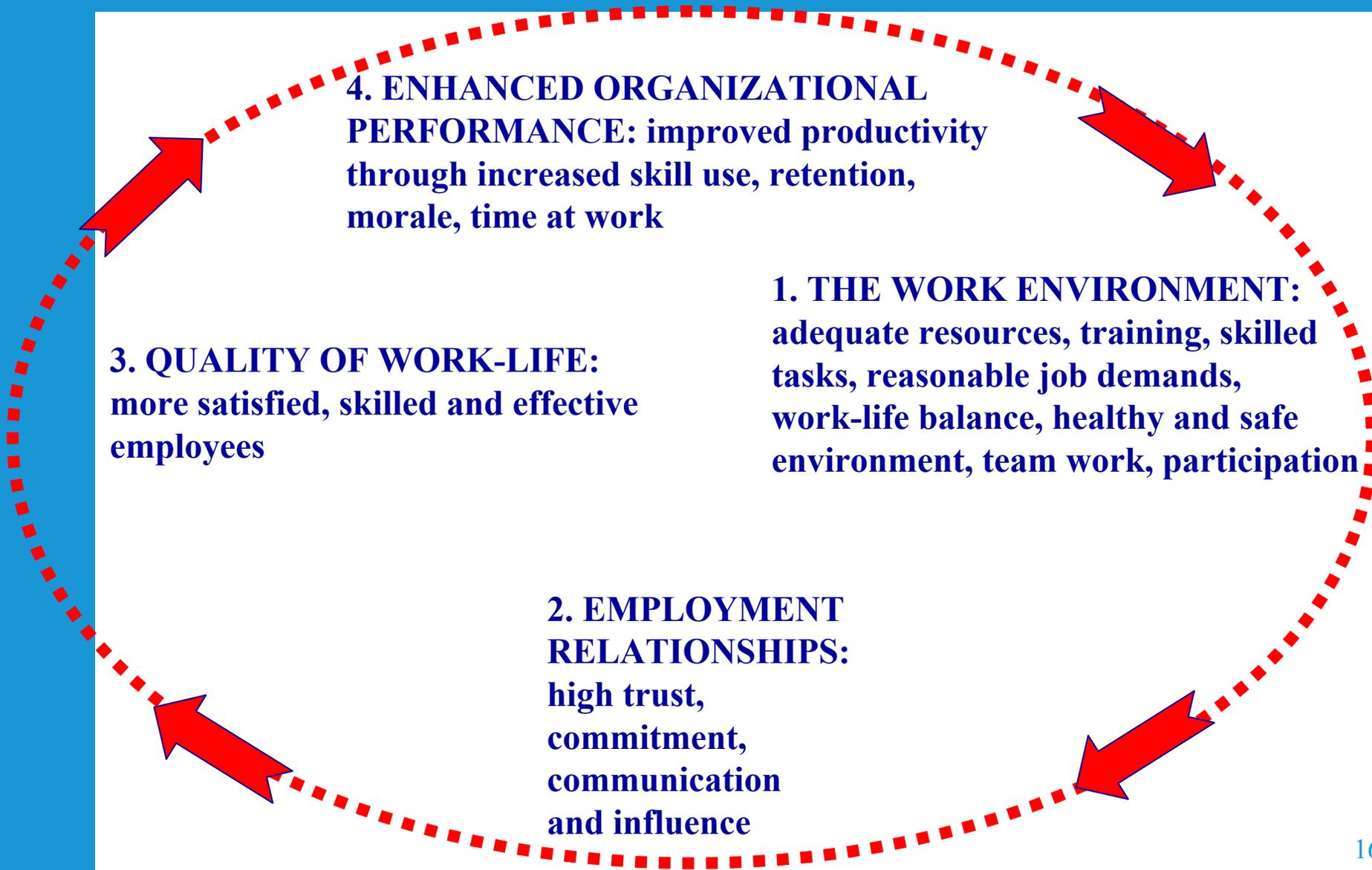
Work environments shape employment relationships

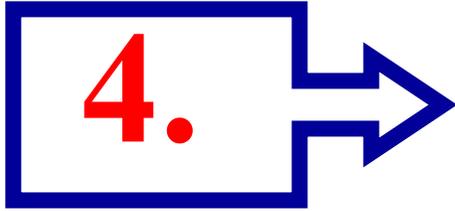
- Strong employment relationships depend on a healthy and supportive work environment
- Organizational change (downsizing, restructuring) weakens employment relationships

Benefits of strong employment relationships

- higher job satisfaction
- higher workplace morale
- better skill development and use
- lower turnover
- better use of employees' skills

How employment relationships impact the quality of work life and organizational performance





Focusing on
health care
workplaces

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Benchmarking health

- Compared to other occupations, health professionals have:
 - Lowest level of trust in their employer
 - Lowest level of commitment to their employer
 - Lowest ratings of workplace communication
 - Least influence on workplace decisions
 - Least supportive and healthy workplaces

Unique features of the health care sector

- ✓ Strong political and public pressures
- ✓ Complex governance
- ✓ Highly unionized
- ✓ Diversity of employment relationships, occupations/professions, organizational forms
- ✓ Technology and knowledge intensive
- ✓ Staff shortages
- ✓ Constant change and restructuring

Components of a high-quality health care workplace

Environmental Pressures:

- Fiscal constraints
- Aging workforce, labour shortages, social change
- Complex regulatory and governance structures
- Rapid turnover in political leadership

Work environment,
human resource
practices

Management
relations with
unions and
professional
associations

Employment
relationships,
culture,
leadership

Job design,
organizational
structure, technology

Outcomes for the organization, employees, patients

Costs of inaction #1

For workers, low-quality health care work environments contribute to:

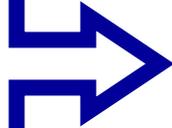
- ✓ Interpersonal tensions
- ✓ Reduced job satisfaction
- ✓ Work-family conflict
- ✓ Occupational injuries
- ✓ Reduced physical and mental health

Costs of inaction #2

For the organization and its clients:

- ✓ Reduced job performance
- ✓ Increased absenteeism
- ✓ Turnover
- ✓ Reduced commitment and trust
- ✓ Demoralized work climate
- ✓ Reduced quality of patient care

5.



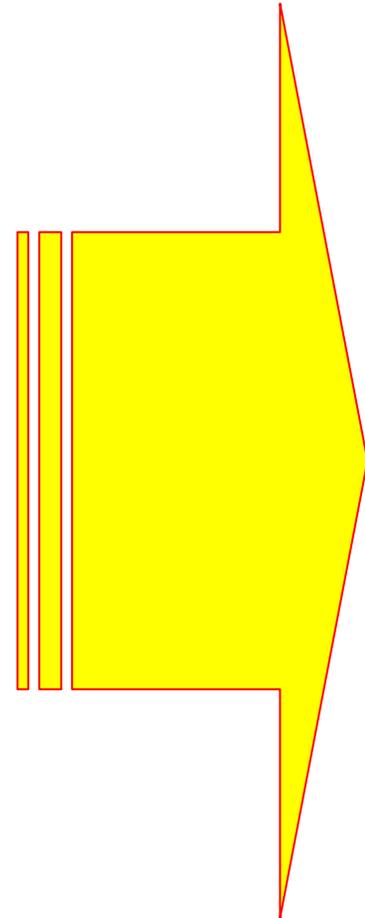
Creating great
places to work

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The old workplace

THE DECLINING BUREAUCRATIC WORKPLACE

- multi-layered, rigid hierarchy
- top-down chain of command
- narrow job descriptions
- lots of routine tasks
- driven by rules and regulations
- training
- some vertical career mobility
- work environment low priority



The new workplace

THE EMERGING FLEXIBLE WORKPLACE

- flatter, fluid organization
- employee participation & autonomy
- information sharing
- team work
- skilled and knowledge-intensive jobs
- learning
- horizontal and spiral careers
- healthy, supportive work environment

Convergent thinking on creating great places to work



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
- Requires an interdisciplinary, collaborative approach to workplace change
- Good fit for health care workplaces because it uses population health thinking

Treating people as assets, not costs

Here's how high quality workplaces help people deliver good results:

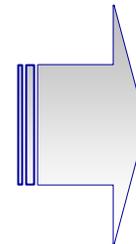
Workplace quality:

- Supportive, healthy work environment
- Resources
- Work rewards
- Job content and design
- Supervision and communication



People capacity:

- Recruitment
- Retention
- Learning and development
- Adaptability



Results:

- Innovation
- Performance
- Quality

Action checklist for employers

- ✓ **Employees are at the core of values and mission**
- ✓ **Work environment goals are in business plans**
- ✓ **Accountability and incentives for treating people as assets**
- ✓ **Employees, unions and professional associations are involved in the change process**
- ✓ **Progress is measured and communicated**
- ✓ **Continuously build on strengths, close gaps**

You can be a change agent

- Focus on your ‘sphere of influence’
- Communicate why changes are ‘urgent’
- Identify opportunities for improvement
- Build on successes and existing initiatives
- Build networks and coalitions for
 - learning
 - resource sharing
 - action