

# Women less happy at work: study

Gender gap closing,  
but females find less  
satisfaction on job

BY KATHRYN MAY

Women are catching up to men in pay and landing the top jobs, but a new gender gap is emerging in the knowledge economy.

Women are less happy with the "quality" of their work than men, according to a newly released study.

A sweeping study into the quality of work, led by think-tank Canadian Policy Research Networks, found university-educated men and women have very different expectations and experiences with work in the knowledge economy.

"Many analysts predicted a big convergence between men and women in the knowledge economy and we've seen the closing of the pay gap and access to professional and managerial jobs, but what people have overlooked was the quality of jobs and there we still find the knowledge economy is very gendered," said Graham Lowe, one of the study's three co-authors.

"And that gender gap splits in two ways — the expectations women bring to the job and the shortfall they experience."

A survey of more than 2,500 working Canadians, 18 years and older, found that "interesting and challenging" work topped the list of sought-after job qualities — regardless of sex or education. But Mr. Lowe said the study found a significant gap between what women want and what they have in their jobs — a shortfall he calls the "job quality deficit."

The study, which also included data from Statistics Canada's General Social Survey, is considered accurate within plus or minus two percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Mr. Lowe said university-educated women put a higher premium than men on the "softer" side of work, such as trust, commitment, loyalty, communication and working relationships with colleagues and managers.

A job that lets you balance work and home is also a bigger priority for women than men — regardless of age and education. Among university-educated women, one-third reported a "job quality deficit" in work-life balance.

About one-quarter said respect and communication on the job fell short of their expectations; one-quarter complained of lower pay, benefits and job security than they wanted and one in seven was dissatisfied with the level of communication in the workplace.

Mr. Lowe argues the importance women attached to these values strongly suggest they want stable and ongoing employment. Women feel they thrive and work best for employers who support their people, listen to their concerns and try to be flexible enough to juggle the conflicting demands of work and home.

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# Gender: Consequences for labour shortage

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And Mr. Lowe said this predisposition to the "softer" qualities of work is entirely linked to gender and not age. The demands of wrestling home and work change at different stages of life, whether single, married with kids or near retirement, but what women want out of their work is the same.

Mr. Lowe argues this finding challenges the "myth" of knowledge workers as "free agents" whose loyalties are to themselves, not their employers. It clearly reveals the "free agents" who will roam from job to job are likely to be men not women, said Mr. Lowe.

"The free agent doesn't put a lot of emphasis on loyalty, job security and working relationships and they are more likely to be men, not women," he said.

Mr. Lowe argues the frustration of female knowledge workers in finding jobs that meet their expectations will have a big impact on the economy — especially in the face of a looming labour shortage as baby boomers retire.

University educated workers are the backbone of the knowledge economy. About 70 per cent of all new jobs demand post-secondary education and more women than men are now graduating from university.

"If you have a gap between what people want and what they have then you have consequences — people quit, morale is low, and it shows up in absenteeism, all of which undermines productivity," said Mr. Lowe.

"As we head into this era of serious competition for knowledge workers, employers better get going and address these issues quickly because if they think they've had problems with recruitment and retention now, they haven't seen anything."

The study also shows information technology is having a different impact on women and men. Both say technology made their jobs more interesting and challenging, but it also raised the expectations and demands of the job beyond what they can handle in the nine-to-five work day. Men tend to use technology more "intensively" than women and believe it has a positive impact on their work.

They say it makes them employable and improve their job security. Women say technology has made them feel less secure about their jobs.

For years, experts called the knowledge economy "gender blind" and predicted all gender biases and gaps of the industrial economy would be wiped out. And the playing field has levelled as more women work, go to university and make their way into

high paying managerial and professional jobs.

But Mr. Lowe argues understanding the differences between what men and women want from their work is the critical piece to the productivity paradox that has confounded experts who believed information technology should have improved Canada's productivity much more than it has.

"If we don't take into accounts these differences then we're missing a vital piece of how firms in the knowledge economy perform. Looking at job quality is a way of understanding productivity. It's the missing piece of the productivity puzzle."

Mr. Lowe insists employers must ensure work lives up to women's expectations, especially in the health care, education and public sectors where they outnumber men. Men may not value the same qualities, but they will feel the consequences if not addressed.

"Look, every organization is a complex social system, where people have to work together, interact and co-operate. So if you have female employees feeling totally under-appreciated, stressed out and demoralized, how can they be good team players with males and others. If it's not good for the female workforce in an organization the effects will ripple through the organization. Everything is inter-connected."