

How Canada Stacks Up: The Quality of Work – An International Perspective

**Prepared for
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December 2003

Research Paper W|23 is available at
<http://www.cprn.org> or on request at (613) 567-7500

Executive Summary

There is growing awareness of the relationship between employment quality and positive workplace outcomes, such as lower turnover and absenteeism and improved productivity performance. In this respect, it has been argued that good jobs attract and motivate employees and, in turn, have a positive impact on the economic performance of firms. The quality of employment available in Canada is one factor that has a bearing on our ability to attract the highly skilled labour we need. This is the first effort to draw together the evidence on how the quality of employment in Canada compares to that in other countries.

This report draws upon newly available Canadian and international data to provide international comparisons of employment quality. CPRN has assembled data on a range of job quality indicators for Canada, the United States, and 15 European countries. Within each of these dimensions are a number of specific indicators of job quality, as shown in the table below.

International Job Quality Indicators

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| <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Health and Well-Being</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work continuously at rapid rate; ▪ Work affects health. | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Skills Development</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Skills match; ▪ Received training; ▪ Work with computers. |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Career and Employment Security</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Incidence of involuntary part-time employment; ▪ Incidence of temporary employment. | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Reconciliation of Working and Non-Working Life</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Annual hours worked; ▪ Incidence of long hours worked; ▪ Work-life balance. |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Satisfaction with Working Conditions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overall satisfaction with working conditions. | |

Key Findings

Reconciling Work and Non-Work Life

- Canadians, on average, work more hours a year than the 17 country average, but fewer hours than U.S. workers.

- Workers in the U.S. report a much higher incidence of working over 40 hours/week than do workers in Canada.
- Despite the long annual hours worked, Canadian workers are happier with the fit between work and family life than the 17 country average. However, the U.S. ranks a little ahead of Canada on the “fit” of work hours with family/social commitments (49 percent in the U.S. versus 45 percent in Canada).
- Denmark and Ireland are leaders in this area, with lower overall workload, low use of overtime, and high “fit” of work hours with family/social commitments.

Health and Well-Being

- Health and safety issues are of particular concern for workers in southern Europe (Greece, Portugal, and Spain), but they also are a serious concern in Canada and the U.S.
- Canadian workers rank fourth in terms of concern for health and safety on the job, with almost 32 percent expressing concern, compared to a 17 country average of 28 percent.
- Canada and the U.S. have the highest incidence of workers who report working at a high speed “all the time”.
- Working continuously at high speed can be related to stress and burnout and ultimately can pose problems for recruitment and retention.
- Workers in Sweden are least likely to indicate that their health or safety is at risk on the job, despite a pace of work similar to that found in Canada and the U.S. This suggests a very strong commitment in Sweden to health and safety issues in the workplace.

Skills Development

- Canada has one of the highest rates of computer use at work, with 61 percent of workers reporting using a computer at work; this compares to the 17 country average of 52 percent and the U.S. average of 54 percent.
- Workers in Canada rank fourth in terms of employer-sponsored training, with 51 percent of paid-workers reporting having received employer-sponsored training in the past year. This compares to the 17-country average of 36 percent and is similar to the incidence of employer-sponsored training in the U.S. of 53 percent.
- Canadian workers are second most likely to feel overqualified for their jobs, after workers in the U.S.

Career and Employment Security

- The incidence of temporary employment in Canada is close to the 17 country average (13 percent versus 12 percent), but is much higher than in the U.S. (4 percent).
- Canada has a relatively high rate of involuntary part-time employment (as a percentage of part-time employment) compared to the overall average (26 percent in Canada versus the 17 country average of 16 percent). Again, this is much higher than the incidence in the U.S., only 7 percent.
- In Canada, and many European countries, where employment protection standards are higher, employers may have an incentive to employ more people on a part-time basis if that means they can avoid rules that apply to full-time workers. The same argument would apply in the case of temporary workers. The fact that fewer people are employed in non-standard jobs in the U.S. may be indicative only of the relatively little protection that is available to all workers, regardless of the nature of their employment contracts.

Overall Satisfaction with Working Conditions

- Workers in Denmark, Ireland, and the Netherlands are most likely to say they are “very satisfied” with their overall working conditions.
- Canadian workers express an above average level of satisfaction with overall working conditions (40 percent versus the 17 country average of 33 percent), but a lower level than U.S. workers (47 percent).

Overview of Country Rankings

- No one country stands out as having a higher level of job quality than the others across all the indicators. However, the Scandinavian countries (especially Denmark), Ireland, and the Netherlands rank consistently high. Workers in southern Europe (Portugal, Spain, Greece, and Italy) tend to rate poorly on many job quality indicators.
- Among all 17 countries studied, Canada generally does better than average on most of the job quality indicators examined. Canada does particularly well in terms of skills development, specifically computer use at work and employer-sponsored training.
- Health and safety stands out as a concern for the job quality of Canadian workers, as evidenced in results on the indicators of high speed work and health and safety risk.

Canada Compared to the U.S.

In comparison with workers in the U.S., Canadian workers, on average, are more likely to use a computer at work and to work on a temporary or involuntary part-time basis. Canadians work fewer annual hours than their U.S. counterparts and are less likely to work over 40 hours per week, or to feel overqualified for their jobs. Despite these advantages, workers in Canada are less satisfied overall with their working conditions than are workers in the U.S.

Policy Implications

High quality jobs are required if Canada is to enjoy economic prosperity and a high quality of life for its citizens. This report highlights a number of issues that need further policy attention.

- The difference in overall job satisfaction between Canada and the U.S. is a concern in terms of attracting mobile, highly skilled workers.
- Employers and governments in Canada should be paying more attention to health and safety in the workplace.
- Work-life balance has been identified in a number of other studies as an issue that also needs to be addressed if overall job satisfaction is to improve.

Governments have two roles to play here. First, they should strive to be model employers. The first step down that road is to measure and track indicators of job quality for their own workforces. Second, they can foster change in the private sector by encouraging employers to track and monitor job quality indicators.

Concluding Comment

This report is a first step in trying to compare ratings of job quality from Canada and the U.S. with many of their European counterparts, based on a limited set of comparable data. More research is needed to explore job quality from an international perspective. Some suggested avenues for future research include: collecting more data which can be compared across countries; measuring trends in job quality over time; exploring determinants of job satisfaction; and measuring additional indicators of job quality.