

Employment relationships as the centrepiece of a new labour policy paradigm

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*Presentation at the Minister of Labour's Roundtable on
Modernizing Labour Policy within a Human Capital Framework
Meech Lake, 19-20 November 2001*



Framing future labour policy...

- ① Understanding employment relationships
- ② Diversity and de-structuring in labour markets
- ③ De-standardized life courses in a risk society
- ④ Learning: enabling contexts and relationship
- ⑤ 4 dimensions of employment relationships
- ⑥ Designing future labour policy around workplaces



1 Understanding employment relationships

Definitions:

- no consensus definition; varies by discipline
- industrial relations and legal perspectives are predominant
- however, a limited focus on unionized workers and formal employment contracts
- must also consider other labour market organizations (e.g., professional assoc's.) and informal 'contracts'

Changes:

- current policy based on outdated assumptions about 'standard employment model'
- ER's have become more diverse, individualized, deregulated, decentralized, tenuous and transitory
- what's changed: rights, obligations, expectations, values shaping interactions among coworkers, employees-employers, self-employed and clients
- this gets at the social and economic norms governing labour market transactions



② Diverse, de-structured labour markets

- ✓ structural boundaries increasingly blurred:
 - ✓ disguised employees among the self-employed
 - ✓ temp agency workers not included in LFS counts
- ✓ the meaning of 'permanent' and 'full-time' employment has been redefined implicitly in the 1990s inside large organizations
- ✓ IT and globalization de-constrain work locations and schedules
- ✓ emerging trends: teleworking, telecommuting, home-based work, virtual work (expect sharper increases in wake of Sept. 11)
- ✓ reintegration of public and private spheres as families and households are linked to self-employment

These structural changes in labour markets and workplaces reconfigure the under layer of work relationships.



③ Life courses in a risk society

- ✓ individual life courses also have been 'de-standardized'
- ✓ diversity and disorder in timing and sequencing of life events: the 'standardized' life course assumed in most social policy is no longer the norm
- ✓ major implications of post-modern/industrial life-course transitions, sequences, trajectories for younger and older workers
- ✓ shifting responsibility to individuals results in increased personal and family risks in any transition
- ✓ also adds complexity to forms and variations in employment relationships



④ Learning: barriers and enablers

New policy context:

- ✓ Responsibility for 'employability skills' has shifted to individuals
- ✓ Life-long learning is promoted as an integrated economic and social policy goal
- ✓ Some employers have adopted 'learning organization' rhetoric

Barriers

- Internationally, Canada is weak on workplace training
- Rising time and cost barriers
- No consensus on how to enable 'life-long learning' in workplaces
- Individualized employment relationships weaken commitment and loyalty
- Learning is an active process requiring a longer-term "asset" view of human capital
- Many skills needed in the knowledge-based economy are 'soft' and depend on good interpersonal relations



⑤ Social-psychological dimensions of employment relationships

- ✓ What's a Good Job (www.cprn.org) study examined trust, commitment, communication, influence
 - Strong ER's depend on a healthy, supportive work environment
 - E.G.: interesting work, job resources, training, employer that cares, perceived fair pay, reasonable workloads, work-life balance
- ✓ Downsizing and restructuring damages trust and commitment
 - ✓ 28% of respondents had been affected by downsizing or restructuring in 1999-2000
- ✓ Union membership associated with weaker employment relationships
 - ✓ These 'soft' issues poses major challenges for unions
- ✓ Strong employment relationships linked to positive outcomes for workers and organizations (e.g., job satisfaction, morale, intent to quit, absenteeism, skill use)



⑥ The workplace as a new policy frontier

- ✓ Workplaces are where big policy goals converge
 - Innovation, productivity, skill development, learning, health, rights, equity, and family functioning are enabled or hindered by workplace policies and practices.
 - This makes employers key policy agents.
- ✓ Current limits of labour market policy
 - Public policy has addressed workplace issues through occupational health and safety, employment standards, employment and pay equity, and labour legislation.
 - There is no agreement on the role of policy beyond these areas.
 - Current policies do not address changes in employment relationships and work arrangements (e.g, self-employment, temp work, home-based work, trust).



The challenge for policy makers

- ① Workplaces are a major site for reaching multiple policy goals, but are not a core policy focus today
- ② Effective responses to present and future work trends requires a new policy framework based on integrative thinking and partnerships
- ③ Building workplaces into policy requires renegotiating the roles of individuals, employers, governments, and other stakeholders
- ④ Governments can shape workplace policy options:
 - ✓ convene stakeholders
 - ✓ form partnerships around specific goals
 - ✓ monitor outcomes
 - ✓ support research and knowledge dissemination



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