

Policy convergence in 21st century workplaces

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Framing future policy issues

Current trends contain insights about future scenarios, trade-offs, contradictions, and challenges....

- ① Changing contexts
- ② Learning and skills
- ③ Quality of life
- ④ Workplaces as a policy frontier



1 Labour market context

Pressures:

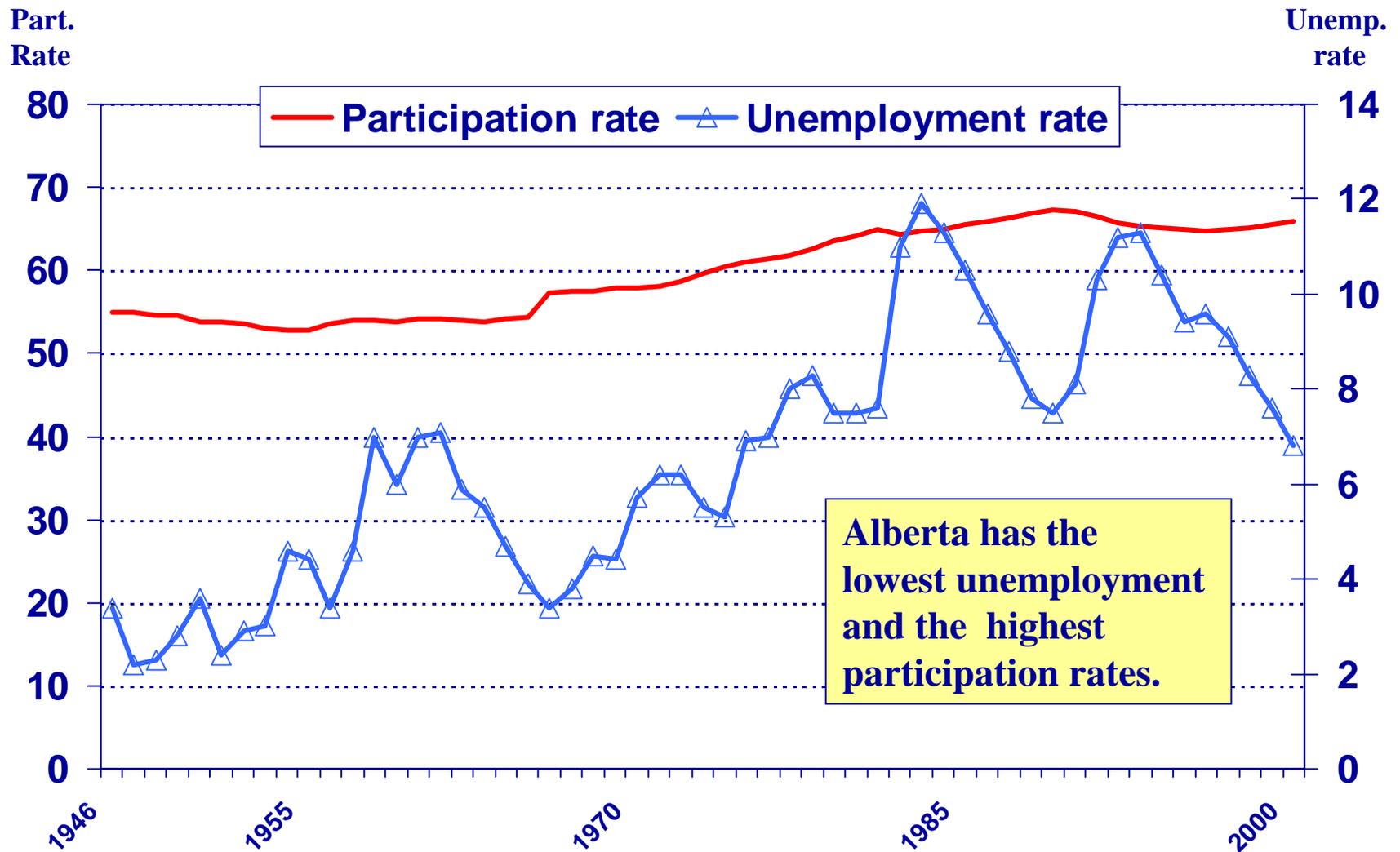
- LF participation plateaued for women
- room to increase among 60+, youth (but could impact educational participation)
- long-term upward drift in peaks and troughs of unemployment
- unemployment rising again, but very uncertain economic environment

Policy implications:

- make better use of underemployed workers, immigrants with unrecognized credentials, early retirees, the trainable unemployed
- paradox of joblessness/underemployment and labour shortages
- a polarized, higher-risk labour market
- do historical scenarios for unemployment make sense now?



Labour force participation and unemployment, Canada, 1946-2000



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey



Demographic context

Pressures:

- baby boom exodus will vary by industry, region, workplace
- US on same trajectory: North American competition; unknown impacts of new 'perimeter' security
- older workers will have diverse transition patterns due to life-course variations
- current responses to labour shortages collide with desire for more leisure/family time

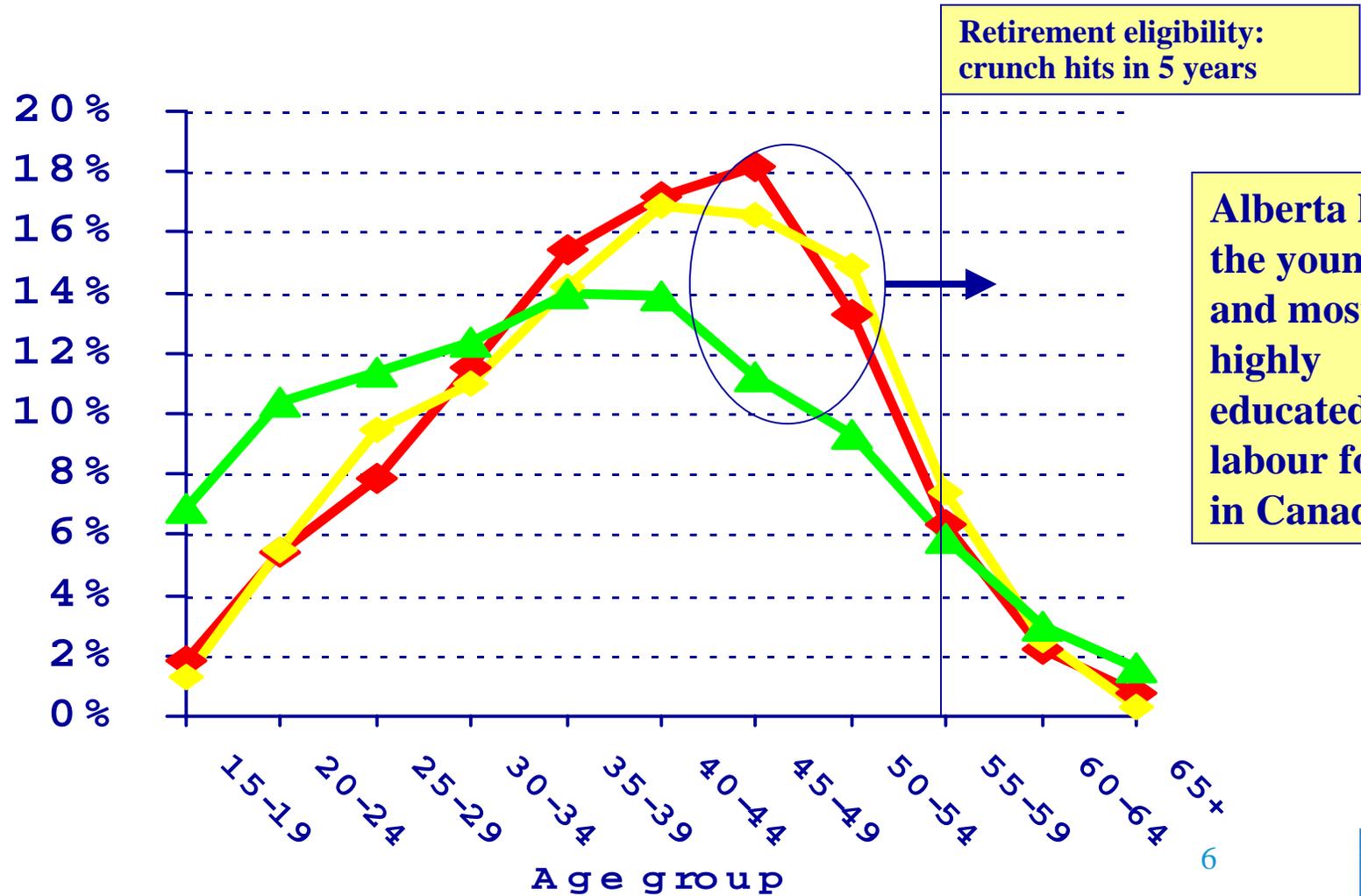
Policy implications:

- rethink concept and institutions of 'retirement'
- flexibility to encourage mobility within and across firms
- pension portability and flexibility
- redefine 'careers' (e.g., horizontal, spiral)



How can employers and governments prepare for the age wave?

Age composition of labour force by sector, Canada, 2000



Alberta has the youngest and most highly educated labour force in Canada.



② Learning and skills

- ✓ More than ever, education determines labour market success
 - Greater marginalization of the least educated: social costs; implications for citizenship
- ✓ Responsibility for 'employability skills' has shifted to individuals
 - Lack support frameworks; rising time and cost barriers
 - Redefined employment relationships, eroding commitment
- ✓ Life-long learning a valued yet vague goal
 - Potential to link economic and social policy
 - Internationally, Canada is strong on post-secondary education but weak on workplace training
 - No consensus on how to enable 'life-long learning', especially in workplaces



A comprehensive view of skills shifts our focus inside workplaces

- Look beyond skill shortages to consider shortages of opportunities for high-skilled work (see: *Expert Panel on Skills report*)
- Must examine both the supply and demand for skills
- How effectively is Alberta maximizing the returns on existing human capital investments?
- **Use and development** of skills and knowledge are enabled or inhibited by:
 - human resource management practices
 - work organization and job design
 - workplace culture and leadership
 - overall business strategy



An inclusive knowledge-based economy

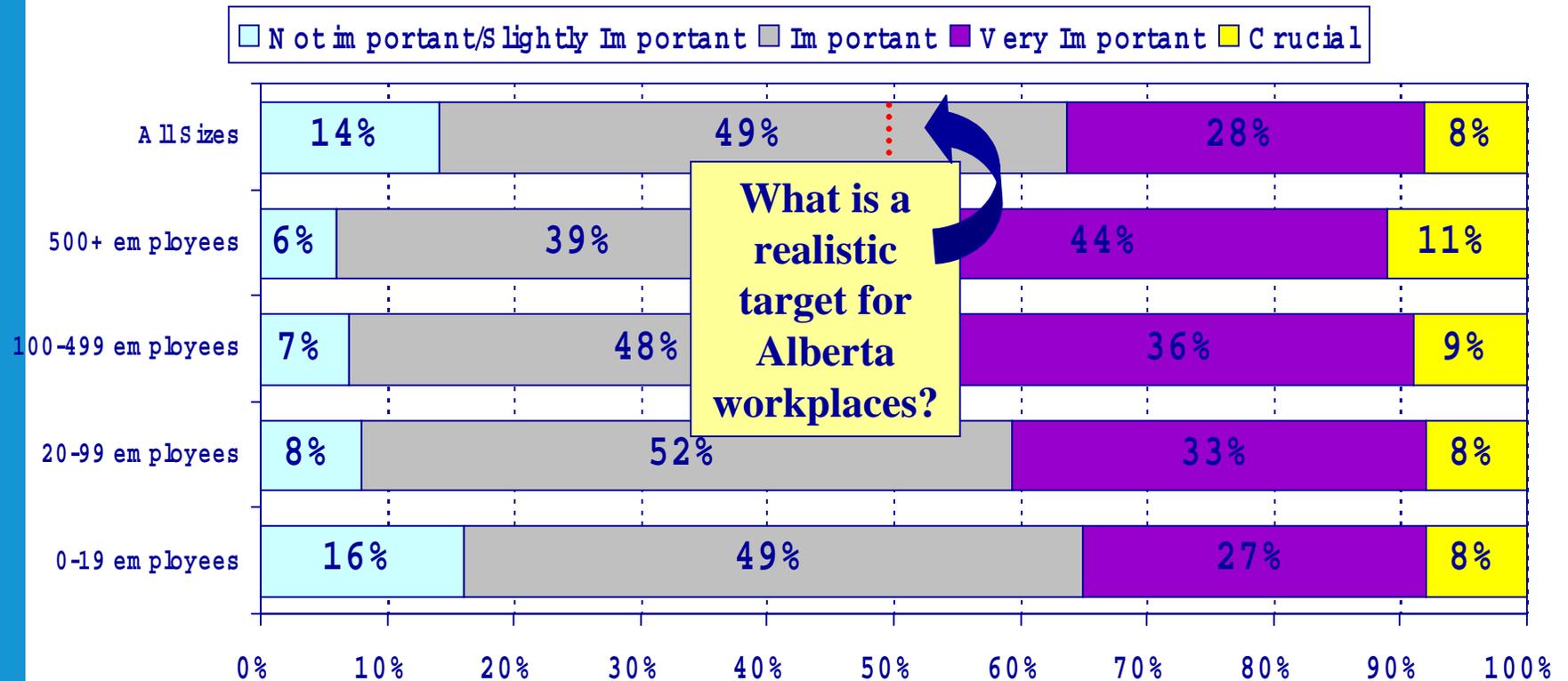
We need to resolve the tensions between an exclusive and an inclusive approach to 'knowledge workers' and a 'knowledge-based economy'

-) all workers have skills and knowledge that can contribute to meeting organizational and economic goals
 - 2 focusing on formal credentials creates a 'knowledge elite'
 - 2 lower-level occupations increasingly use information technology
 - 2 don't forget small firms, the self-employed, the voluntary sector
-) an inclusive approach to knowledge work meets social policy objectives for:
 - 2 *access to education and training*
 - 2 *employment equity*
 - 2 *life-long learning*
 - 2 *reduced labour market polarization*



Major barrier: most employers do not integrate skill development into their business strategies

Employer emphasis on increasing the skills of employees as part of their business strategy, by workplace size, Canada, 1999



“Strategic” human resource management supports public policy goals.



③ Work and the quality of life

Work intensification: *long or 'non-standard' work hours, inflexible schedules, rising workloads are reducing the quality of life and undermining economic goals*

✓ Implications for family

- rising work-family conflict
- support for working parents means support for children

✓ Implications for health

- psycho-social stress, physical health problems
- 'unhealthy' working conditions have significant public and private health costs

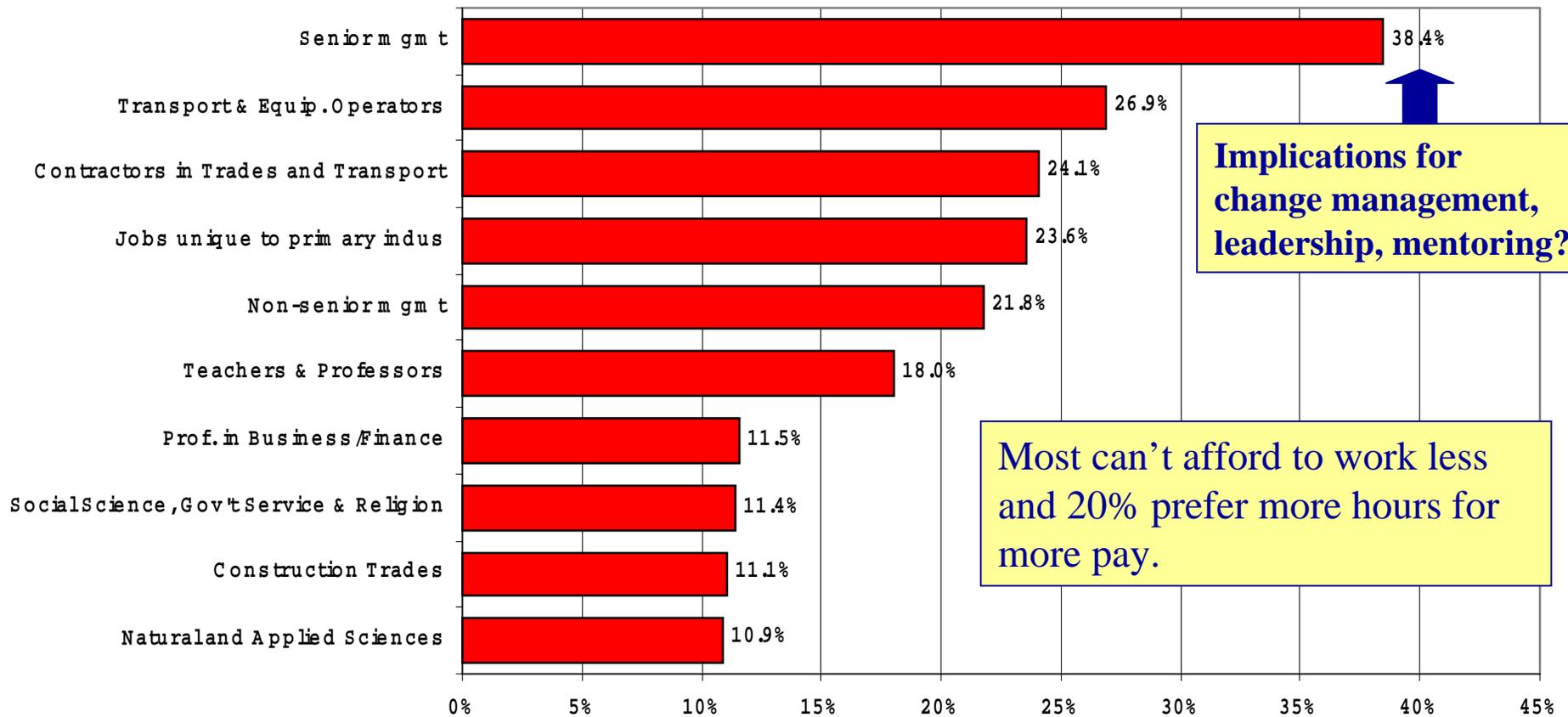
✓ Implications for productivity

- absenteeism, morale, turnover, lack of time for learning
- need to understand the mechanisms by which work environments affect firm results *and* employee outcomes

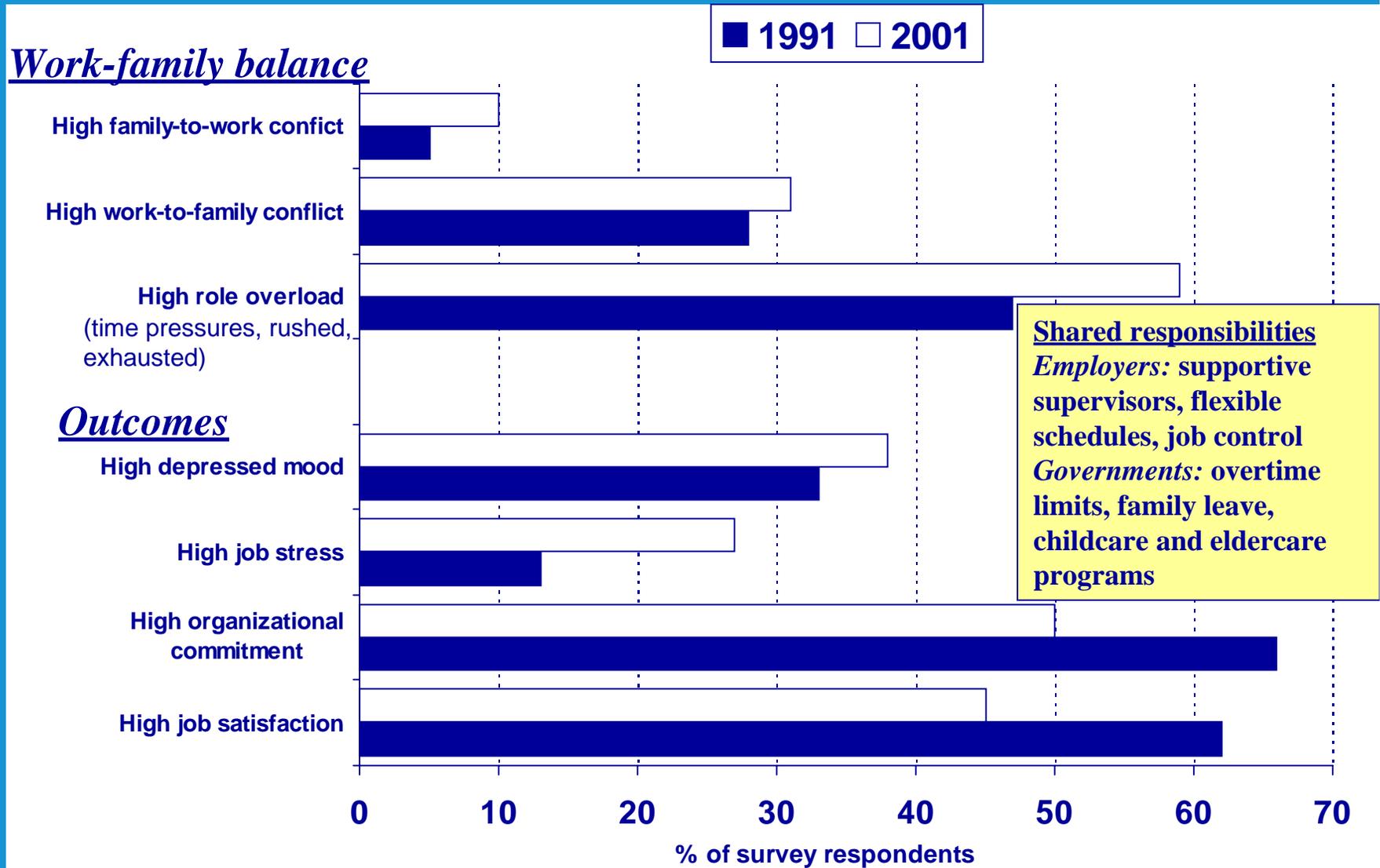


Long work hours: impacts on quality of life and productivity

Percent of Employees Working 50 or more Hours per Week,
(Top 10 Occupations), Canada 1999



Work - family conflict and its consequences



Source: Duxbury and Higgins, *Work - Life Balance in the New Millennium* (CPRN Discussion Paper, October 2001)



Finding solutions: workplace innovation strategies

The ‘high performance workplace’ model is skill-intensive, flexible, and high-involvement. It addresses what workers’ value in jobs:

- flat organization
- team-based work
- flexible job design
- commitment to training and learning
- employee participation
- sharing of rewards and information
- promote health, well-being, work-family balance
- supportive supervisors

Research suggests that ‘bundles’ of these factors are linked to quality of work life and productivity, which in turn contributes to HR attraction, development and retention goals.



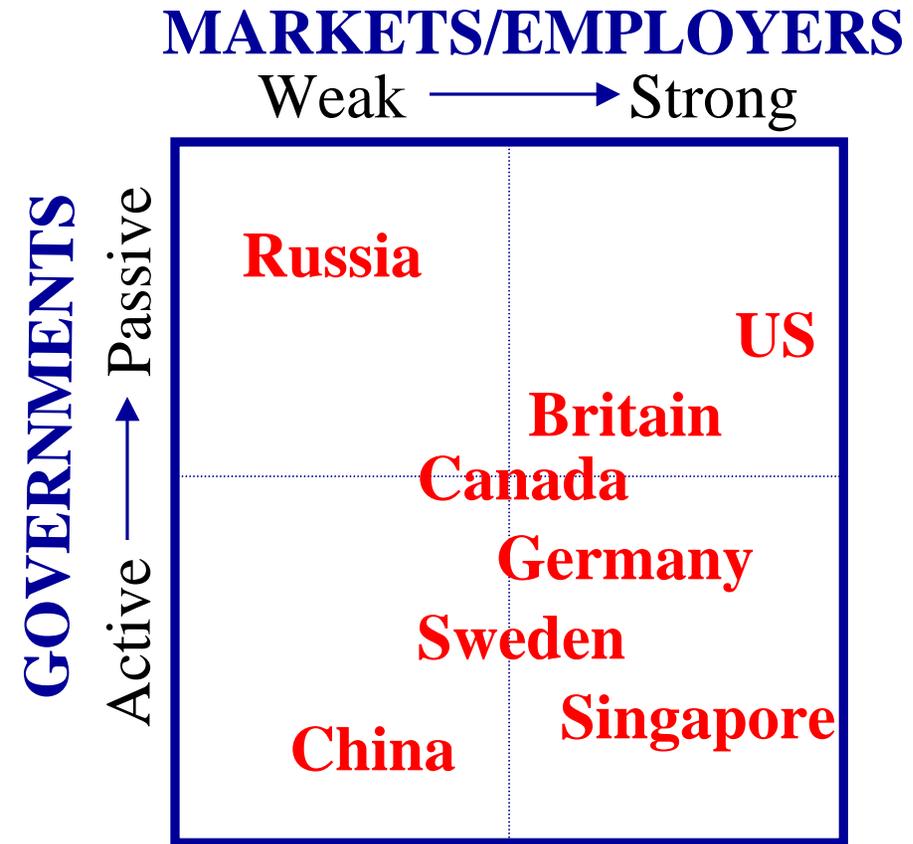
④ The workplace as a new policy frontier

- ✓ 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.
- ✓ The 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).

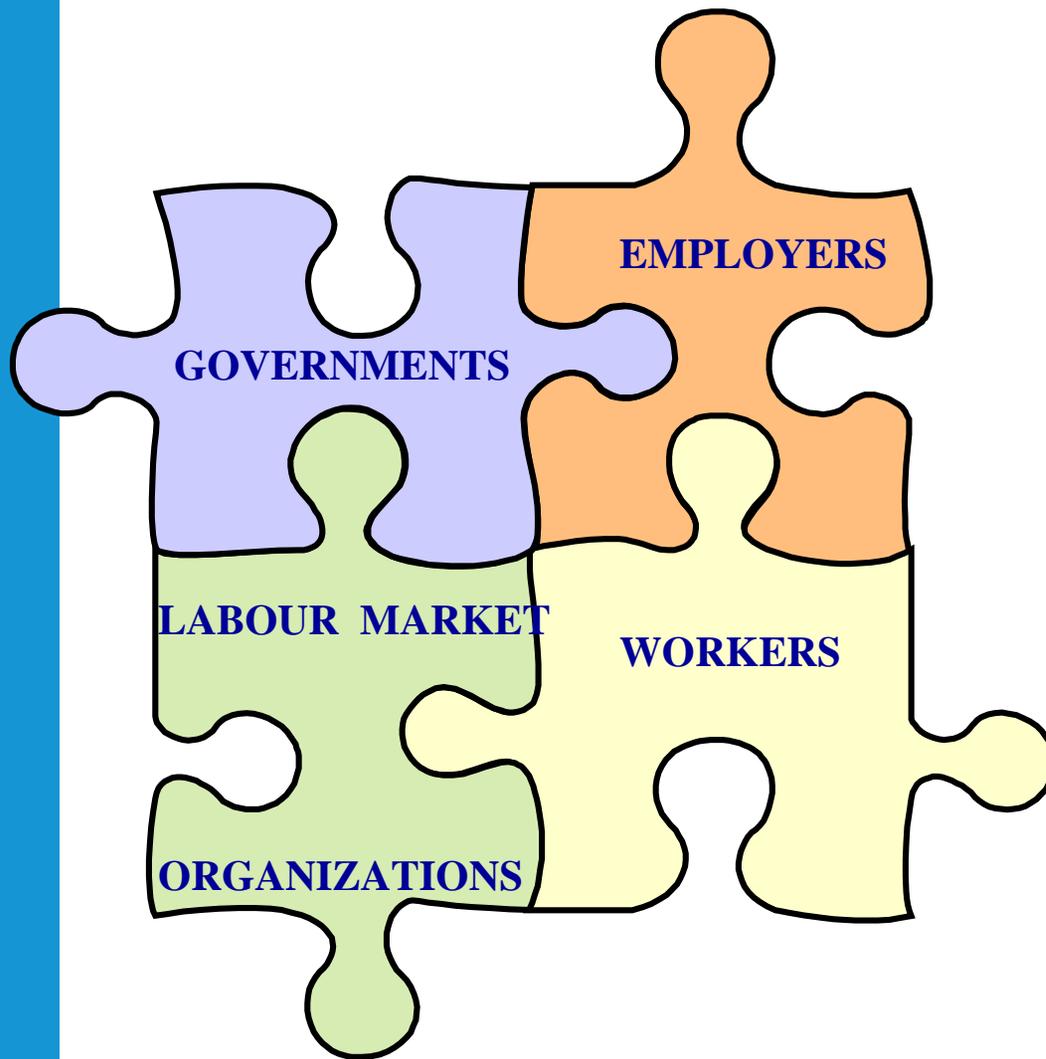


Aligning states and markets in labour market policy

This shows the relationship between the role of governments in labour markets and the extent to which regulation of work is left to 'market forces' and employers. I have located 8 nations on these 2 axes as examples for discussion.



A multi-partner approach to workplace policy



Examples:

- 6 Canada: Sector Councils
- 6 UK: Investors in People
- 6 Denmark: 'flexicurity' and sabbaticals
- 6 Singapore: Integrated Workforce Development Plan
- 6 Ireland: New Work Organisation in Ireland Programme



The challenge for policy makers

- ① Effective responses to present and future work trends requires a new policy framework based on integrative thinking and partnerships
- ② Workplaces are a major site for reaching multiple policy goals, but are not a core policy focus today
- 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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