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CPRN RCRPP

The Quality of Work

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**Canadian Policy Research Networks
& University of Alberta**

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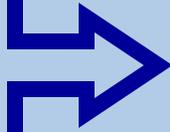
My focus today...

- ✓ What is high-quality work?
- ✓ Why does it matter?
- ✓ How do we create it?



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1.



Defining the quality of work



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A checklist of quality-work goals

- ✓ A decent living standard and economic security
- ✓ Mutual trust among employers and workers
- ✓ Participate in decision making
- ✓ Culture of openness regarding information
- ✓ Healthy and safe work environment
- ✓ Supports a balanced life
- ✓ Encourages initiative and creativity
- ✓ Opportunities to use and develop skills

The result is personally meaningful, fulfilling and productive work

How does your organization measure up?

Six trends that focus our attention on the quality of work



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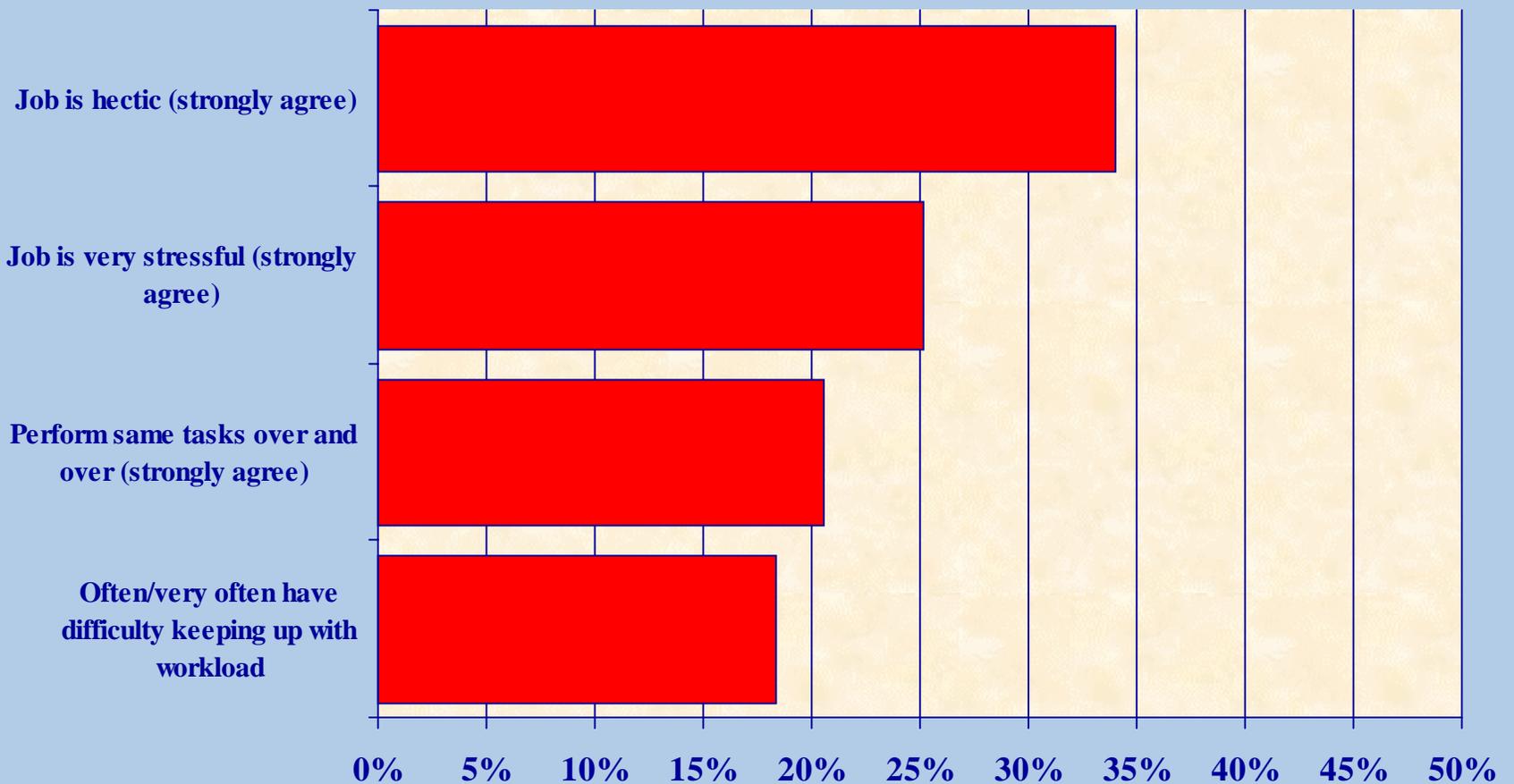
- Global knowledge economy: skills, knowledge, creativity - 'human capital' -- are the key ingredients for economic prosperity
- Information & communication technology: payoffs from these investments depend on work design and environments
- Education: Canada has the best educated labour force in the world, so we need to ensure that this talent is used
- Life-long learning: what kinds of work contexts support this?
- Demographics: ageing workforce, baby-boom retirements create workforce renewal challenges
- Values: this is what Canadians want

There are many signs that low-quality work is a problem.

Percent of Canadian workers reporting that



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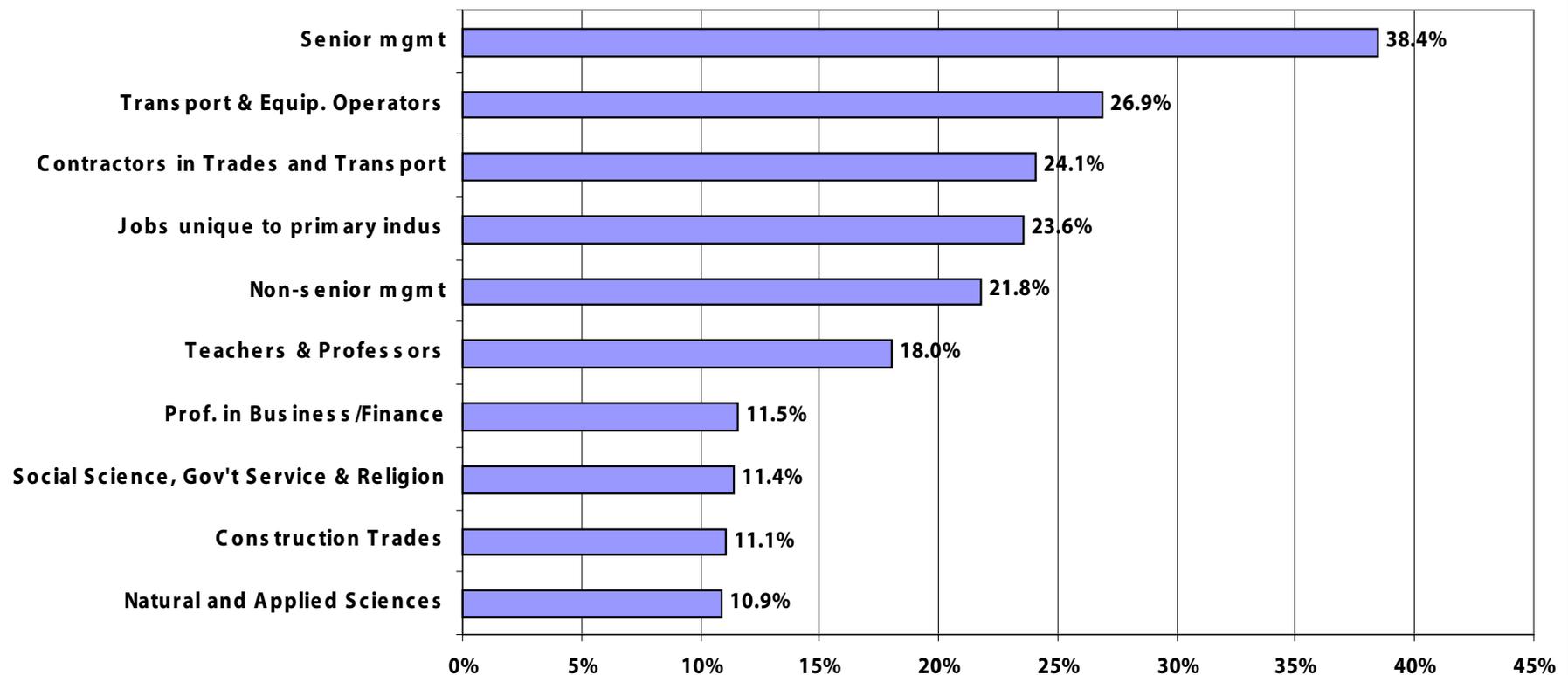
Source: CPRN-Ekos Changing Employment Relationships Survey 2000 (n=2500).

Long work hours: What are the implications for the quality of work life and productivity?



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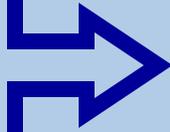
Per cent of Paid Employees Working 50 or more Hours per Week,
(Top 10 Occupations), Canada 1999





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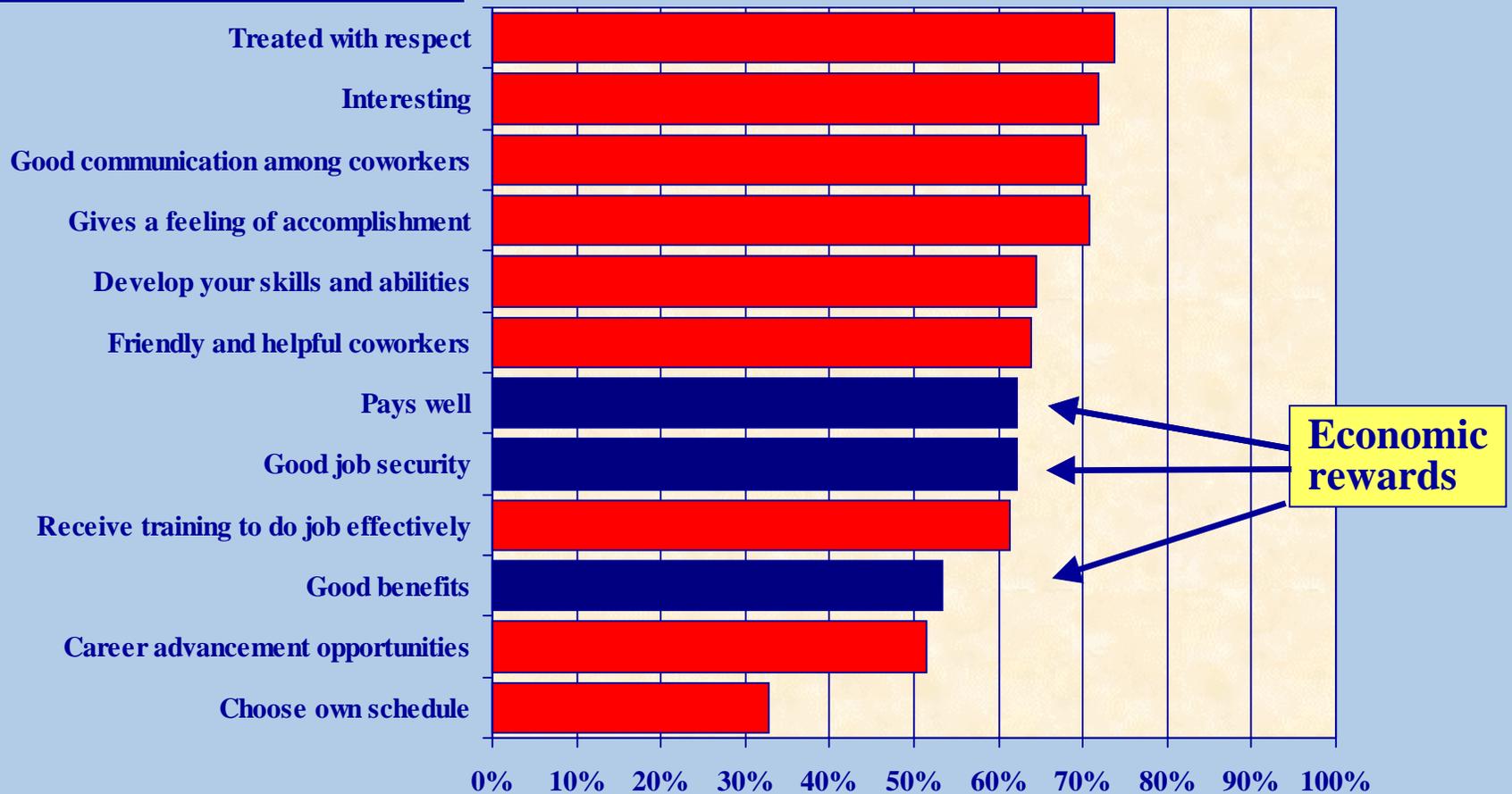


Canadians value high quality
work



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What workers consider “very important” in a job, Canada, 2000



Source: CPRN-Ekos Changing Employment Relationships Survey 2000 (n=2500).

Is the **nexus** generation different?



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“Ultimately, the best reward for Nexus employees is what they want most from work: challenge, collaboration, task variety, and greater impact. While keeping compensation current and competitive is part of the equation, employers should spend equal time thinking about how they might recognize Nexus with the next project or opportunity.”

Source: Robert Bernard, Dave Cosgrave and Jennifer Welsh, *Chips and Pop: Decoding the Nexus Generation* (1998: 199)

- True, but these values are not unique to this age group (mid-20s to late 30s) or to the age we live in.
- Personally rewarding work has long been a core value.

How do we know that young people's work values have not changed much?



- Much speculation but little solid evidence of cohort differences
- School-Work Transition Study can address this by comparing matched samples of 1985 and 1996 Edmonton high school and university grads
 - SEE: www.ualberta.ca/~glowe/transition
- Recognize that the '80s and '90s encompass several distinct cohorts
- Faced with greater uncertainty, risk, and instability in school-work transitions, how are youth adapting their aspirations and attitudes?
- Expect persistent social and economic influences in this regard:
 - strong influence of gender, social class background, education



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Valued job characteristics among 18 year olds

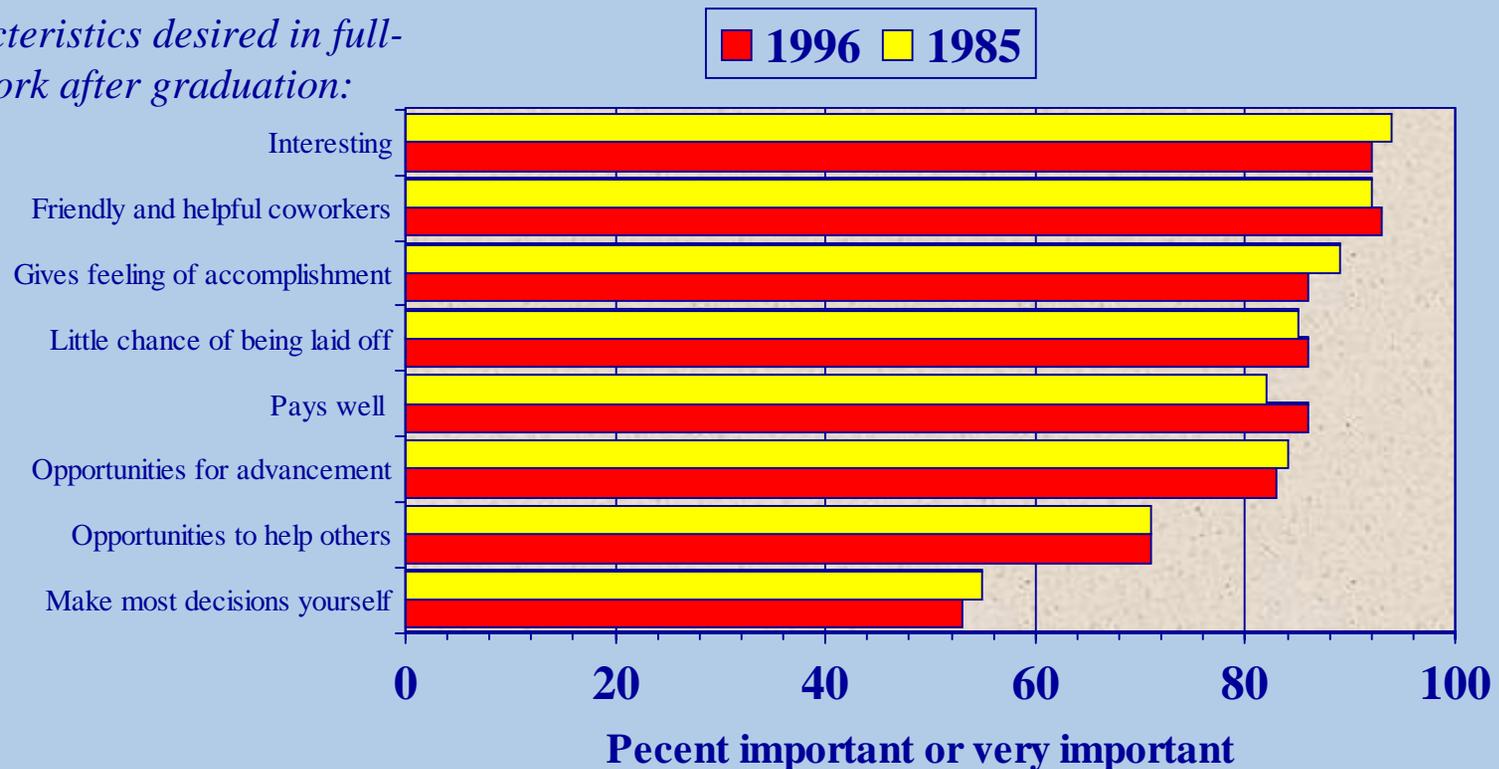
- consistency in values over 11 years
- want jobs that are interesting, have friendly/helpful co-workers, give feeling of accomplishment
- pay only slightly more important in 1996; no change in security
- also found consistently strong work ethic and education ethic



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Continuity in work values, 1985 and 1996 Edmonton high school graduates

Characteristics desired in full-time work after graduation:



Source: G. Lowe and H. Krahn, 'Work aspirations and attitudes in a era of labour market restructuring.' *Work, Employment and Society* (2000). Also see School-work Transition Study website: www.ualberta.ca/~glowe/transition

Valued job characteristics among university grads



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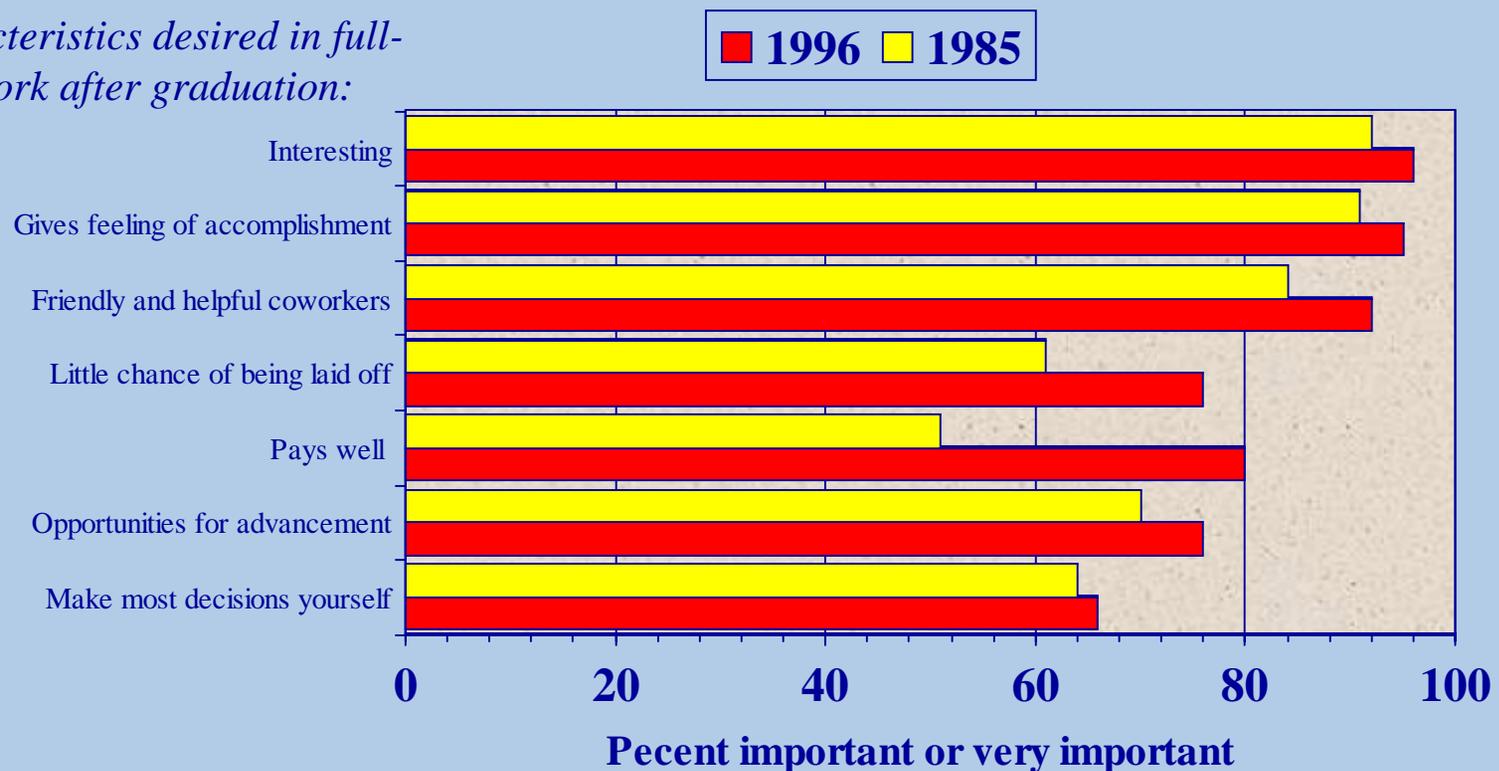
- more change than among high school grads over 11 years
 - this reflects longer and broader exposure to changing labour market and economic conditions
- but emphasis on jobs that are interesting, give feeling of accomplishment, have friendly/helpful co-workers
- increase in importance placed on pay and security
- decision making more important than for high school cohort, but this changes with age and work experience



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Changes in work values, 1985 and 1996 University of Alberta graduates

Characteristics desired in full-time work after graduation:



Source: S. Rollings-Magnusson, H. Krahn and G. Lowe, *Does a Decade Make a Difference? Education and Work among 1985 and 1996 University Graduates*. School-Work Transitions Project Report 99-1. University of Alberta, 1999.

The generations converge on job quality goals



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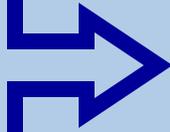
- Job quality problems first seriously raised when baby boomers entering job market in 1970s
 - Needs urgent attention in an era when human resource development and ‘life-long learning’ and ‘knowledge’ really matter
 - The same basic management and organizational barriers exist today as in 1970s
- **KEY IMPLICATION:** Work rewards and working conditions that will attract and retain youth also desired by older workers
 - In this respect, there is continuity across the generations
 - However, there’s always been age differences in job expectations and satisfaction, because workers adapt to their changing circumstances and diminishing choices over time as they move through the life course (e.g., youth are more ‘critical’)
 - Also, the desire for participation increases with age
 - This approach avoids the internal inequities created by emphasizing the needs of one age group over another

DON'T FORGET WORK AND LIFE NEEDS OF 35, 45 AND 55 YEAR OLDS!



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3.



Why the quality of work matters



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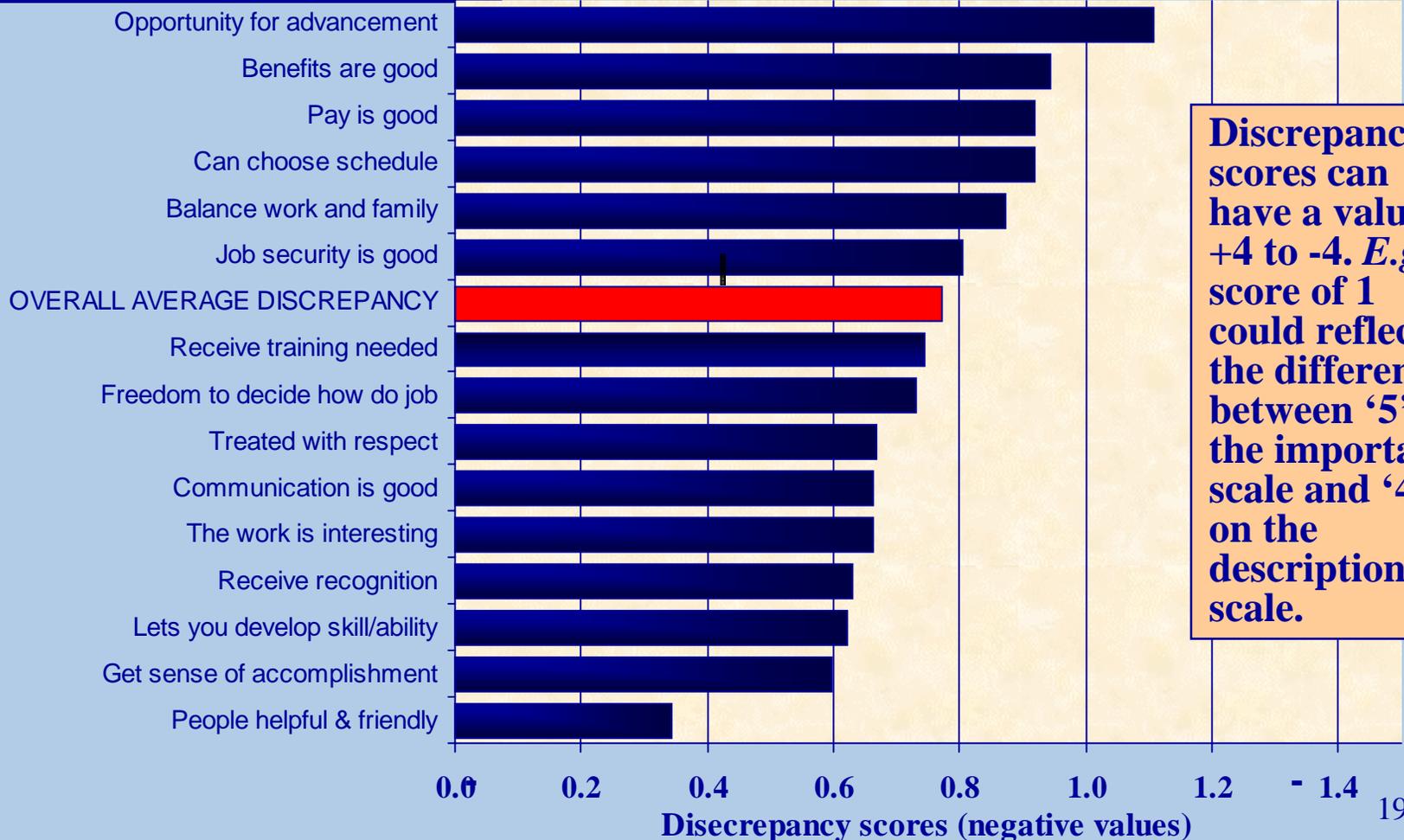
The ‘Job Quality Deficit’: Looking at the gap between what workers want and have

- Uses data from the *CPRN-Ekos Changing Employment Relationships Survey, 2000* (n=2500).
- Respondents were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed (5-point Likert scale) that each statement *described* their current job.
- Later, respondents were asked to think about what's important for them in a job, and to indicate how *important* (5-point ‘not at all important - very important’ Likert scale) each aspect would be if they were looking for a new job today.
- Subtracting the “**importance**” scale from the “**description**” scale provides a discrepancy score -- the **Job Quality Deficit** -- which expresses the gap between what workers have and what they want.



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The 'Job Quality Deficit': comparing what workers want in a job with what they actually have



Discrepancy scores can have a value of +4 to -4. E.g., a score of 1 could reflect the difference between '5' on the importance scale and '4' on the description scale.



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Reducing the job quality deficit

- High quality work must provide decent benefits and pay
- But also crucial, ‘intrinsic’ job rewards that provide personal fulfillment are most important to Canadians
- Human resource management policies and practices must address both sets of needs

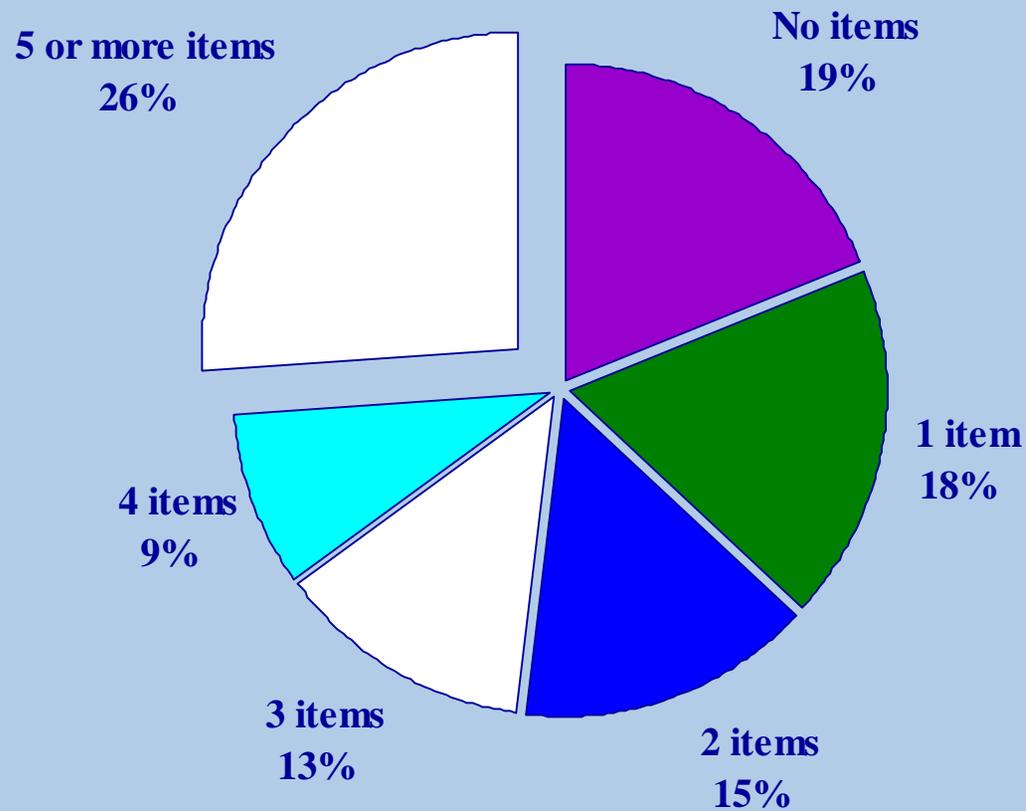
Source: CPRN-Ekos Changing Employment Relationships Survey 2000 (n=2500).



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Number of job characteristics in which respondents have a large* 'Job Quality Deficit'

* Large deficit is defined as a difference of -2 to -4 when two 5-point scales are compared.

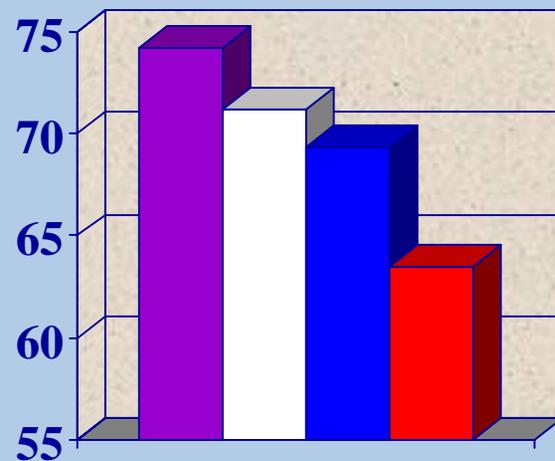
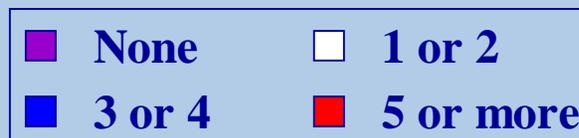




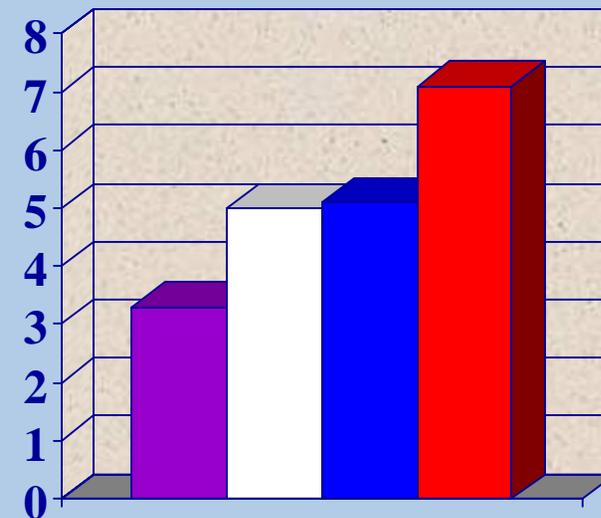
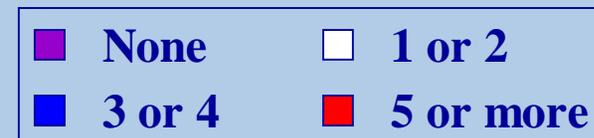
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Job Quality Deficits and health outcomes

of Job Items on Which Respondent Reported a Large Job Quality Deficit



% reporting excellent/very good health



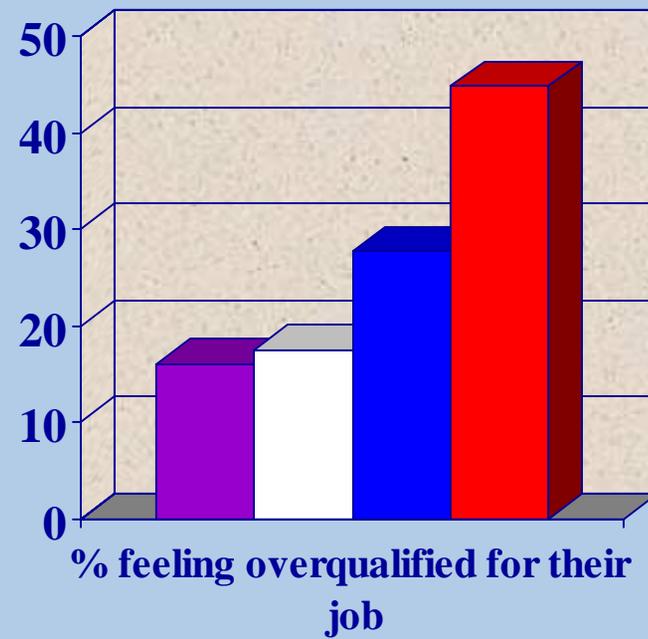
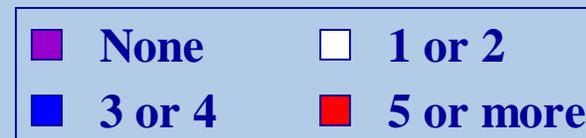
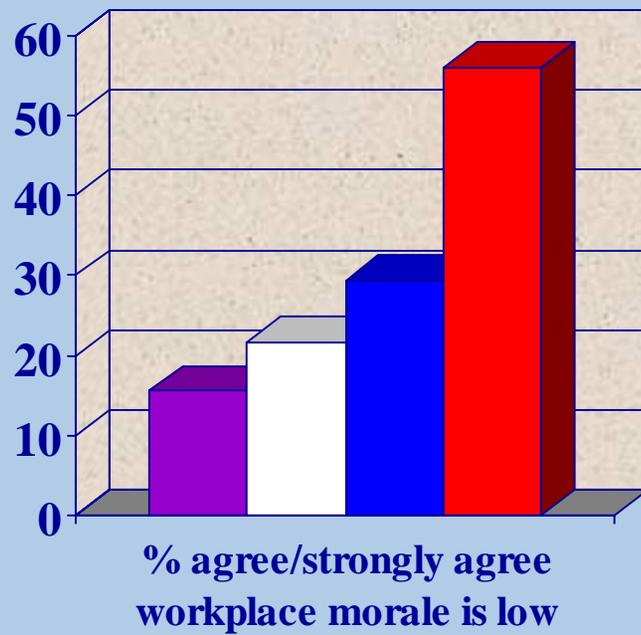
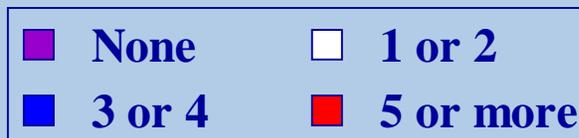
Average # days absent for illness/injury last yr.



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Job Quality Deficits and human resource outcomes

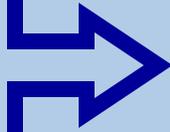
of Job Items on Which Respondent Reported a Large Job Quality Deficit





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4.



How employment relationships shape the quality of work

Four dimensions of employment relationships



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- CPRN's *Changing Employment Relationships Project* identifies four underlying dimensions of employment relationships:
 - ✓ trust
 - ✓ commitment
 - ✓ communication
 - ✓ influence
- these are the social and psychological underpinnings of work
- they add to our understanding of what shapes the quality of work

See: G. Lowe and G. Schellenberg, *What's A Good Job? The Importance of Employment Relationships*. CPRN Research Report, to be published in March 2001.



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Major influences on employment relationships among employees

- An employee's demographic characteristics or location in the labour market (e.g., standard or non-standard work) do not account for variations in employment relationships.
- Strong employment relationships depend on :
 - a healthy and supportive work environment
 - interesting work
 - receiving the needed training
 - having the tools and resources to do the job
 - job security
- Organizational change also affects employment relationships.
 - downsizing reduces commitment and trust.
 - 'restructuring' negatively affects communication.

The strength of employment relationships impacts job satisfaction

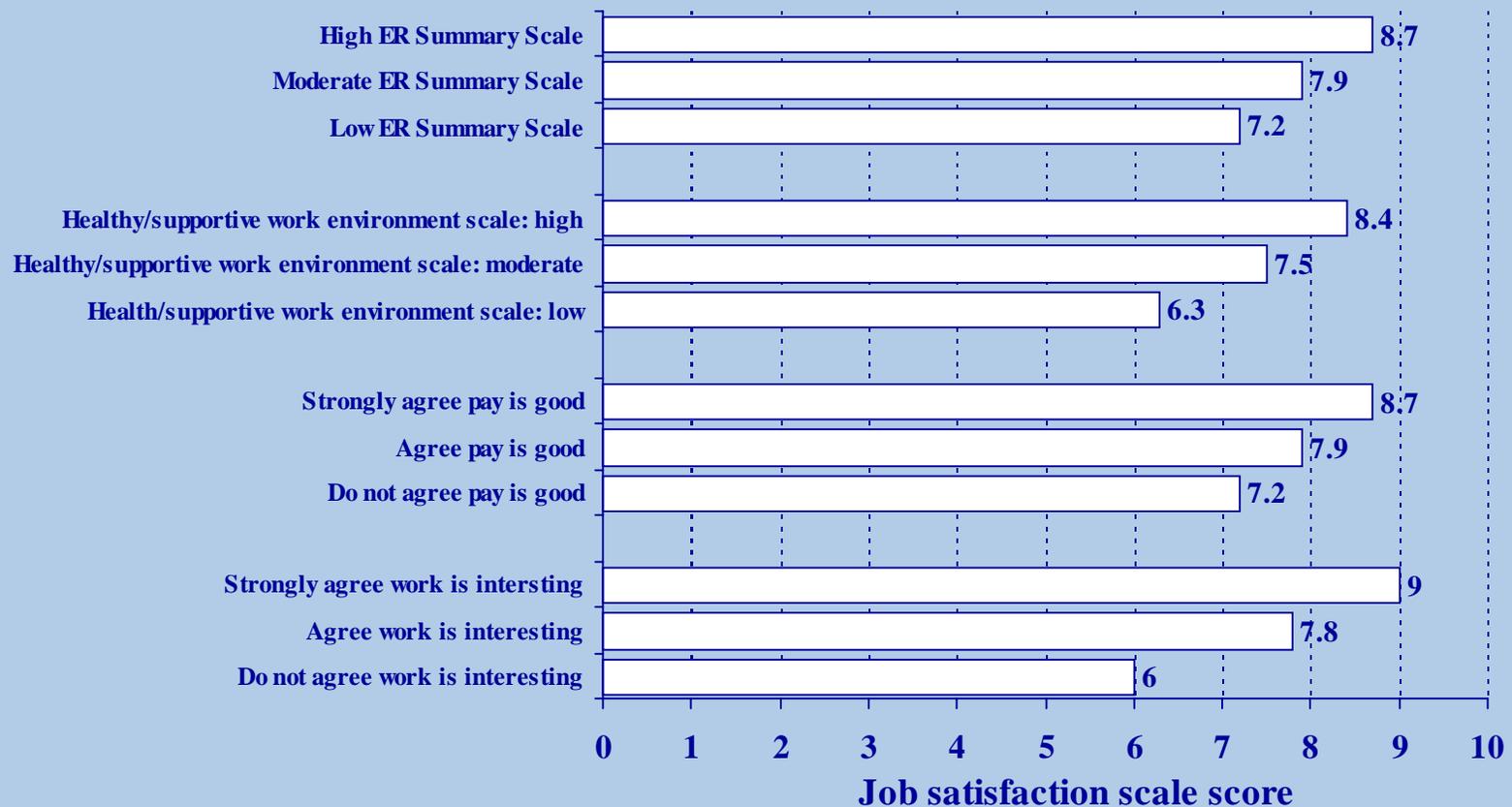


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- Employment relationships matter for individuals.
- Job satisfaction is a good indicator of the overall quality of work life.
- Employment relationships and job satisfaction are closely linked.
- Individuals with ‘strong’ employment relationships report significantly higher levels of job satisfaction (net of other factors).



Mean Score on Job Satisfaction Scale, by Selected Characteristics



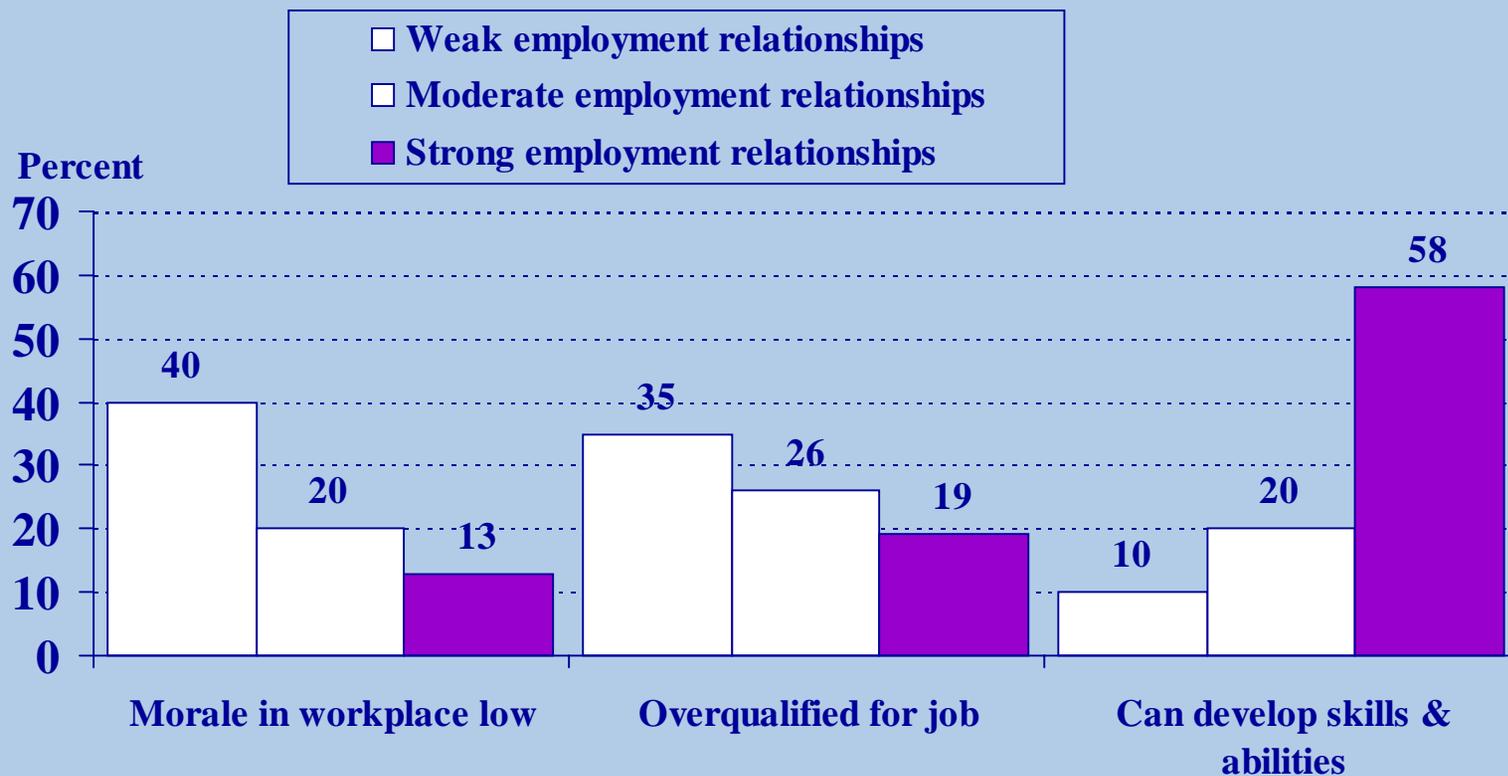


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Employment relationships also matter for employers

- Growing concern among employers about recruitment and retention.
- So we examined the impact of employment relationships on turnover.
- Employees in weak employment relationships were significantly more likely to have looked for another job than individuals with moderate or strong relationships (net of other factors).
- We found a similar pattern for absenteeism, after taking into account employee health status and a range of other characteristics known to influence absenteeism.

More evidence of how employment relationships matter: selected outcomes by strength of employment relationships*

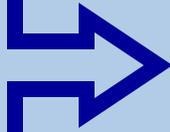


* Measured on Employment Relationships Summary Scale
Source: CPRN-Ekos Changing Employment Relationships Survey.



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5.



Creating higher quality work



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A summary of workplace factors that influence job quality

- employment relationships
- job requirements and design
- management practices and supervision
- overall business strategy
- organizational structures and processes
- work environment
- organizational culture
- worker attitudes and behaviour

**Quality influences
are systemic.**



Innovative workplace practices improve the quality of work *and* productivity

The high performance workplace model is also called 'high-trust - high-skills', 'high involvement', 'flexible':

- 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.



But workplaces change slowly

- Most firms still have traditional job designs, make low investments in people, are authoritarian, and don't respond to employees' personal needs
 - A conclusion from: G. Betcherman et al., *The Canadian Workplace in Transition*, 1994, p. 58
- Barriers to workplace innovation include:
 - mind-set that employees are costs, not assets
 - lack of information about alternatives
 - no perceived problem, lack of a 'crisis'
 - resistance from front-line managers
 - top-down, centralized control stifles risk-taking lower down
 - union resistance to work reorganization (yet some of the most innovative workplaces are unionized)

To conclude: moving from insights to action



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- ✓ How can we ensure that members of each graduating class have excellent prospects for finding high quality jobs?
- ✓ For different groups of experienced workers, what are the most important changes needed to improve the quality of their work?
- ✓ What is the role of employers in improving the quality of work, and how can they be convinced that this is an important goal?
- ✓ What is the role for public policy in promoting higher quality work? Note its links to major social (quality of life) and economic (productivity) policy goals.

Career counsellors can play a key role by informing job seekers of all ages about job quality issues.



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