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CPRN RCRPP

Will today's youth find “quality work”?

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Presentation outline

- ✓ Key demographic and labour market trends
- ✓ School-work transitions in the '80s and '90s
- ✓ Changing work values and goals among youth
- ✓ Rethinking employability skills
- ✓ What workers want in a job
- ✓ Job quality as a policy goal



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The **nexus** generation?

“Ultimately, the best reward for Nexus employees is what they want most from work: challenge, collaboration, task variety, and greater impact.”

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

This is generally accurate, but for the wrong reasons:

- Nexus includes several distinct ‘cohorts’
- Simplifies complex demographic and labour market trends
- These work values are not unique to this age group -- all ages want quality work



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Cautions about pop-demography

- Nexus generation born between early 1960s and late 1970s
 - now in their mid-20s to late 30s, comprising 8 million or 25% of population
 - Derived from Douglas Coupland's novel *Generation X* - good popular culture but bad demography
- This includes several distinct birth cohorts
- Most Nexus made the school-work transition during the economic turbulent '80s and '90s, when labour markets became more competitive and polarized
 - Yet entering the labour market in 1981-5 or 1990-3 very different experience than at the end of each decade
- Differences between sub-groups of Nexus likely as great as between Nexus and Boomers
 - Not a meaningful way to group the labour force for recruitment purposes
 - Important to separate cultural mythology from basic demographic, social and economic forces that shape people's lives

A closer look at youth demographic trends



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Demographics doesn't explain 2/3rds of everything, as David Foot argues, but colliding economic and demographic trends have big implications for educators and employers.

- shrinking youth (15-24 years) cohorts in Canada:
- as % of working-age population (WAP = 15-64 years), the youth population is smaller now than in the 1970s or 1980s
- in 1998, 2 in 10 WAP were youth, down from 3 in 10 in late 1970s
- Statistics Canada projects a continued decline in youth as % of WAP to 2021
- composition of youth has changed: more teenagers now
- provincial variations: youth a growing % of WAP in BC, Alberta
- by 2010, the retiring cohort (54-64 years) will outnumber youth, creating conditions for major labour shortages



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Youth labour market trends

- youth have been getting less work experience and more education in the 1990s
 - % of 17-19 year olds who have never worked for pay increased from 9.2% in 1989 to 26.3% in 1998
- since early 1980s:
 - chronically high youth unemployment, declining relative wages, more contingent work, rising educational enrolments, longer and more difficult transitions
- early 1990s to 1998:
 - declining labour force participation, rising educational costs, greater polarization, growing 'educational premium'
 - university grads the big winners in the job market in the 1990s
- since early 1998:
 - youth participation rates up, unemployment down, but polarization trends persist (less-educated males most at risk)
- 8 in 10 youth work in the service sector, most in lower-tier
 - retail employs 25% of all youth, but more opportunities now in upper-tier (business and professional services, health care, social services)



Canada's "new" economy...

The top 6 industries in terms of employment:

1. retail
 2. health care & social assistance
 3. durable manufacturing
 4. nondurable manufacturing
 5. educational services
 6. accommodation & food services
- these industries employ 49% of all workers

Other labour market trends shaping employment futures:

- 17% of workforce is self-employed
- 14% of employees are temporary
- 1 in 4 employees work part-time
- 34% of employees are in small firms (< 20 workers)

The 'new' economy contains huge chunks of the old economy and is very polarized.

Impact of changing youth labour markets



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- One result is shifts in young people's expectations:
 - they see need for more education (the first 'life-long learners'?)
 - they expect not to achieve parents' living standard
- Tough times for youth raise generational equity issues
 - e.g., debates about Canada/Quebec Pension Plan
- Early paid work experiences in low-quality 'student jobs'
 - teaches young people what they *don't* want in a job
- Young people increasingly seeking volunteer work experience (33% volunteered in 1997, up from 18% in 1987)
- Growing emphasis on '**employability skills**' resulted in 'school-business partnerships' and work-experience programs
 - Have we evaluated the benefits of 'work experience' courses in high school?



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Are youth able to embark upon fulfilling and productive lives?

- Based on my research with Harvey Krahn of 1985 Edmonton grads, the answer is **yes**
- But it takes more time and requires more education
- The risks and costs of failed transitions are greater
- When re-surveyed in 1992, most of these Edmonton high school and university grads had moved into full-time jobs, achieved independent adult status, formed partnerships and had started raising families
- Big concerns = the least educated (especially males), aboriginal youth ⇒ greater risk of outright exclusion

Visit the **School-Work Transitions Project website**: www.ualberta.ca/~glowe/transition



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How have school-work transitions been changing?

- Growing diversity, uncertainty, risk and individualization of transition patterns and experiences
- But still find continuities in how social and economic factors shape the transition
 - influence of gender, social class background, education
 - education has become a more powerful determinant of who succeeds
- Have young people adjusted their work attitudes and expectations as a result of changing school-work transition experiences?



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The “Classes of ‘85” in 1999

- Insights from the employment histories of the Edmonton high school and university classes of '85.
- Over half of the high school sample and 41% of the university sample had completely switched careers since 1985.
- Typically, respondents had 4 to 5 different employers (not counting student jobs or self-employment).
- Approximately 1 in 3 had been self-employed at some point.
- Sizeable numbers also had been unemployed during this 13-year period (58% of the high school sample and 44% of the university sample).
- Just over 1 in 3 had taken time out of the labour market, mainly to have children.
- Close to 90% in both samples were employed at the time of the 1999 follow-up survey.
- Self-employment was more common than either part-time or temporary work, but still lower than labour force average. This refutes one of the myths about this generation.

Employers must acknowledge the diversity of work histories, looking for the strengths this can provide. These young workers may expect lots of career variety.

Source: School-Work Transition Study, 1999 follow-up survey.



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How different are today's young people from earlier cohorts?

- 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
- 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?
 - Occupational aspirations
 - Characteristics sought in a job
 - Broader orientations to work and education
- There are persistent social and economic influences in this regard:
 - strong influence of gender, social class background, education



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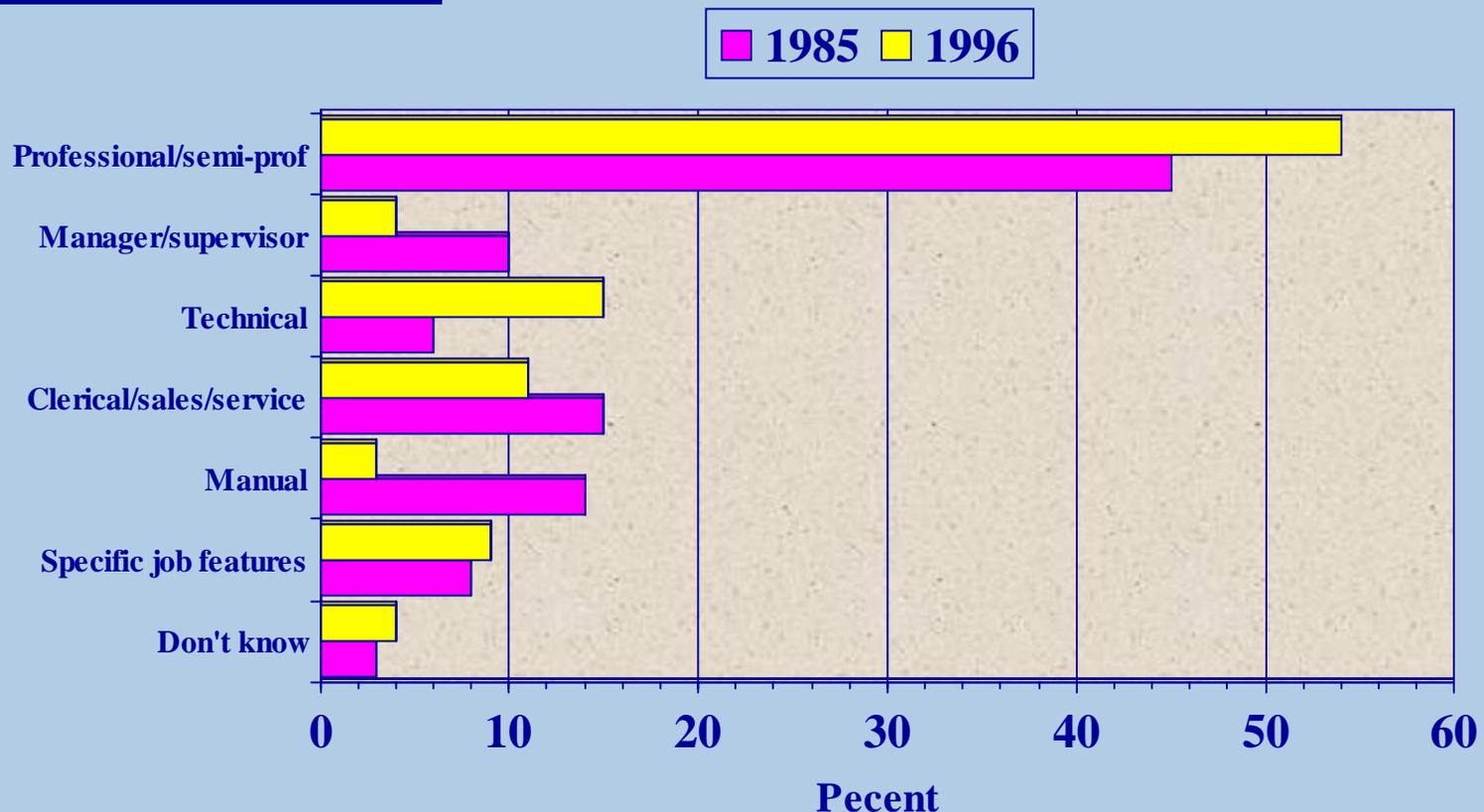
Occupational aspirations among grade 12 students

- upward drift in aspirations from manual and ‘pink-collar’ jobs to professional and technical jobs
- fewer want to be managers or supervisors
- very few had no occupational goal
- strong SES, gender and program differences
- females shifting out of traditional female jobs, into technical and professional jobs

Kind of job or career respondent eventually wants, 1985 and 1996 Edmonton grade 12 students



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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



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Valued job characteristics among 18 year olds

- remarkable consistency in values over 11 years
 - work attitudes and aspirations still formative in high school
- want jobs that are interesting, have friendly/helpful coworkers, give feeling of accomplishment
- less concern with autonomy, helping others (stronger value among females)
- pay only slightly more important in 1996
- no change in security
- consistently strong work ethic, education ethic, and sense of entitlement

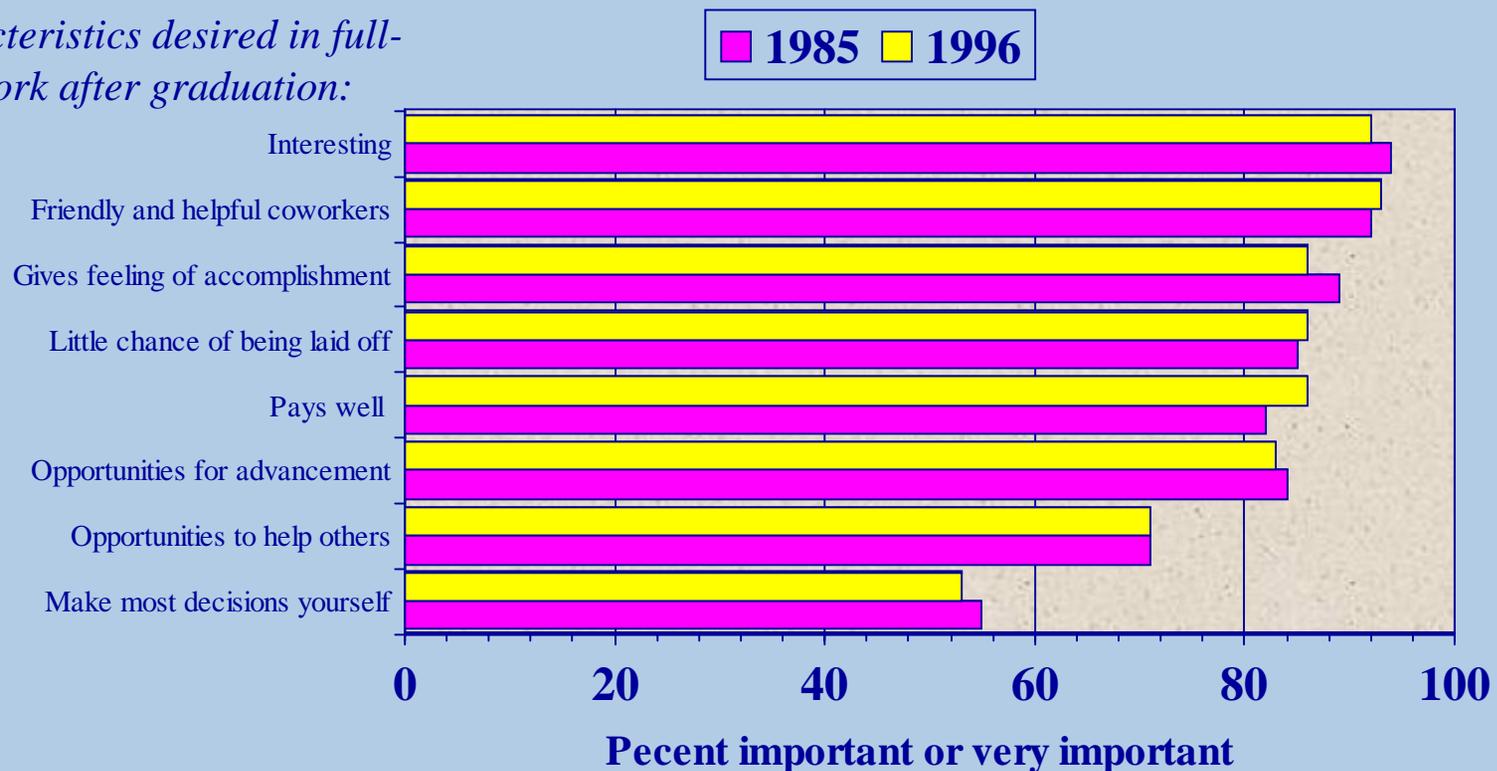
**Despite major changes in the economic environment, work values were stable.
What would the 2000 graduating class think?**



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Changes in work values, 1985 and 1996 Edmonton grade 12 students

Characteristics desired in full-time work after graduation:

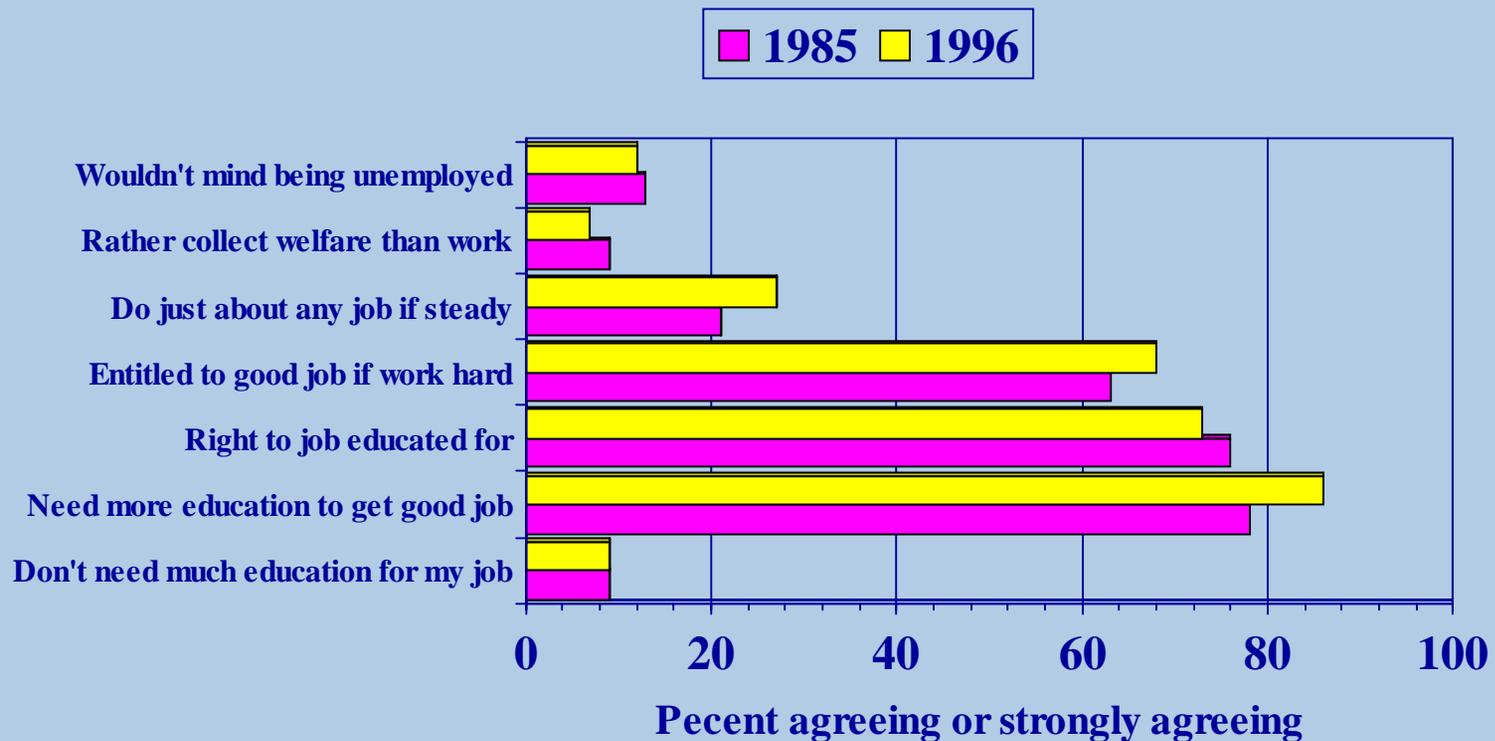


Source: G. Lowe and H. Krahn, 'Work aspirations and attitudes in a era of labour market restructuring.' *Work, Employment and Society* (2000). Also see School-work Transition Study website: www.ualberta.ca/~glowe/transition

Attitudes about work and education, 1985 and 1996 Edmonton grade 12 students



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Source: G. Lowe, H. Krahn, J. Bowlby, *1996 Alberta High School Graduate Survey: Report of Research Findings*.
Population Research Lab, U of A, 1997.



Summary: career goals and work attitudes

- more want professional and technical careers
- work values stable over time
- strong work ethic and education ethic (especially females)
 - HOWEVER: 74% believe that everyone has the right to the kind of job for which their education has prepared them
 - 64% believe that if someone has worked hard in school, they are entitled to a good job
 - 65% agree that it will be harder for people in their generation to live as comfortably as previous generations.
- gender, socio-economic background, and high school program are still good predictors of aspirations and attitudes

**Will these young people find interesting and fulfilling jobs?
This raises the issue of job quality -- a big future challenge.**

Employability Skills: The Work-Relevance of High School?



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- 74% of respondents felt that their communication skills and reasoning skills had improved in high school
- 67% felt their ability to work with others in groups had improved
- 47% felt that their ability to use a computer had improved.
- However, only 46% felt that their education had provided skills needed for the workplace.
- This suggests that some students have a limited view of work requirements, or do not perceive the relevance of high school education for careers.



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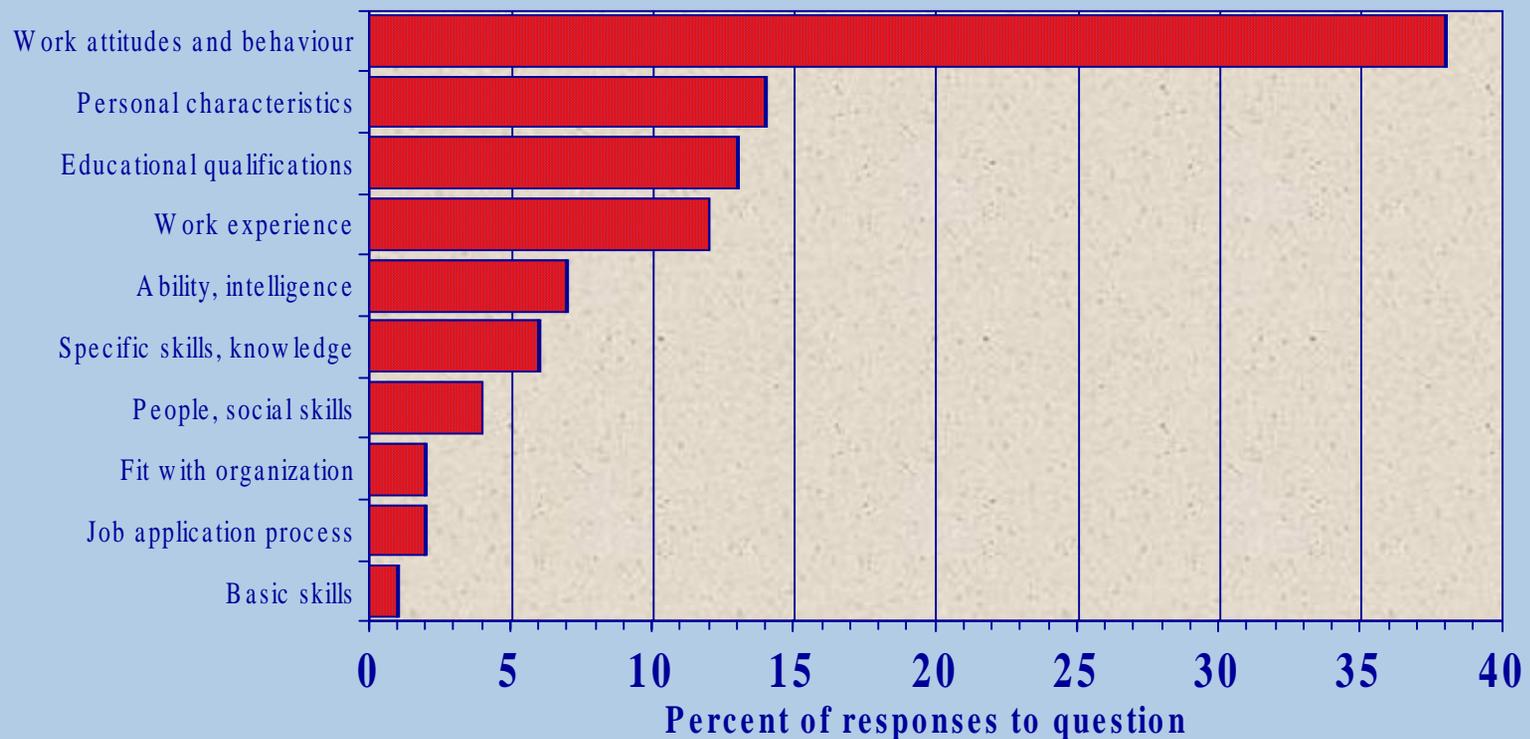
Grade 12 students' self-reported acquisition of job-related skills from 4 sources: high school courses, work experience programs, current jobs, and current volunteer work

- Students acquired people skills (such as social and interpersonal skills, helping others, team work, etc.); work attitudes and behaviour (such as personal development, discipline, hard work, etc.); basic academic skills (notably speaking, numeracy, writing and reading); and specific technical and computer skills.
- High school courses, compared to the other 3 sources, are the most likely site for the development of analytic and basic academic skills, even though few students see these skills as relevant to the workplace.
- People skills are more likely to be acquired in paid jobs or in volunteer work.
- Business skills (general and specific) are mainly developed in jobs and in work experience programs.
- 6% had used a computer for word processing in their paid jobs
- When asked about the job-relevant skills which high school had *not* provided them, respondents emphasized specific job preparation (e.g., knowledge of what workplaces are like, job search skills, and practical experience) and specific technical skills.



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Grade 12 Students' Views of the Most Important Things Employers Look For When Hiring a High School Graduate



Respondents were asked to list 3 things. All three responses are combined in this graph. The 2,525 respondents to this question provided a total of 7,284 responses. Reported here is the percent of responses.

Source: G. Lowe, H. Krahn, J. Bowlby, *1996 Alberta High School Graduate Survey: Report of Research Findings*.
Population Research Lab, U of A, 1997.



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Rethinking employability

- There are multiple perspectives on employability issues. What influences how students understand ‘skills’?
- Students have acquired a variety of job skills in high school courses, work experience programs, paid jobs, and volunteer work.
- Important to recognize these diverse sources of employability skills.
- Given the consensus that basic academic skills are essential in today’s workplace, it is striking just how little emphasis grade 12 students place on academic skills when assessing the job-relevance of their education or what employers want.
- Despite having acquired general employability skills, students tend to work in jobs that underutilize these skills.

What are the appropriate roles for students, parents, schools, employers, and community organizations in defining and developing employability skills?

Looking Back into the Future

Recurrent concerns about young people's work prospects...



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- “It is not that youth is unwilling to work...It is simply that they have rejected the tightly circumscribed environment that the older worker has come to accept...younger people seek more creative roles...”

Canadian Chamber of Commerce, 1973.

- “If young people are willing to adapt and to accept the values of the hierarchical work situation...we can be assured that little attention will be given to restructuring work.”

*H. Sheppard and N. Herrick,
Where Have All the Robots Gone?, 1972.*

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’)



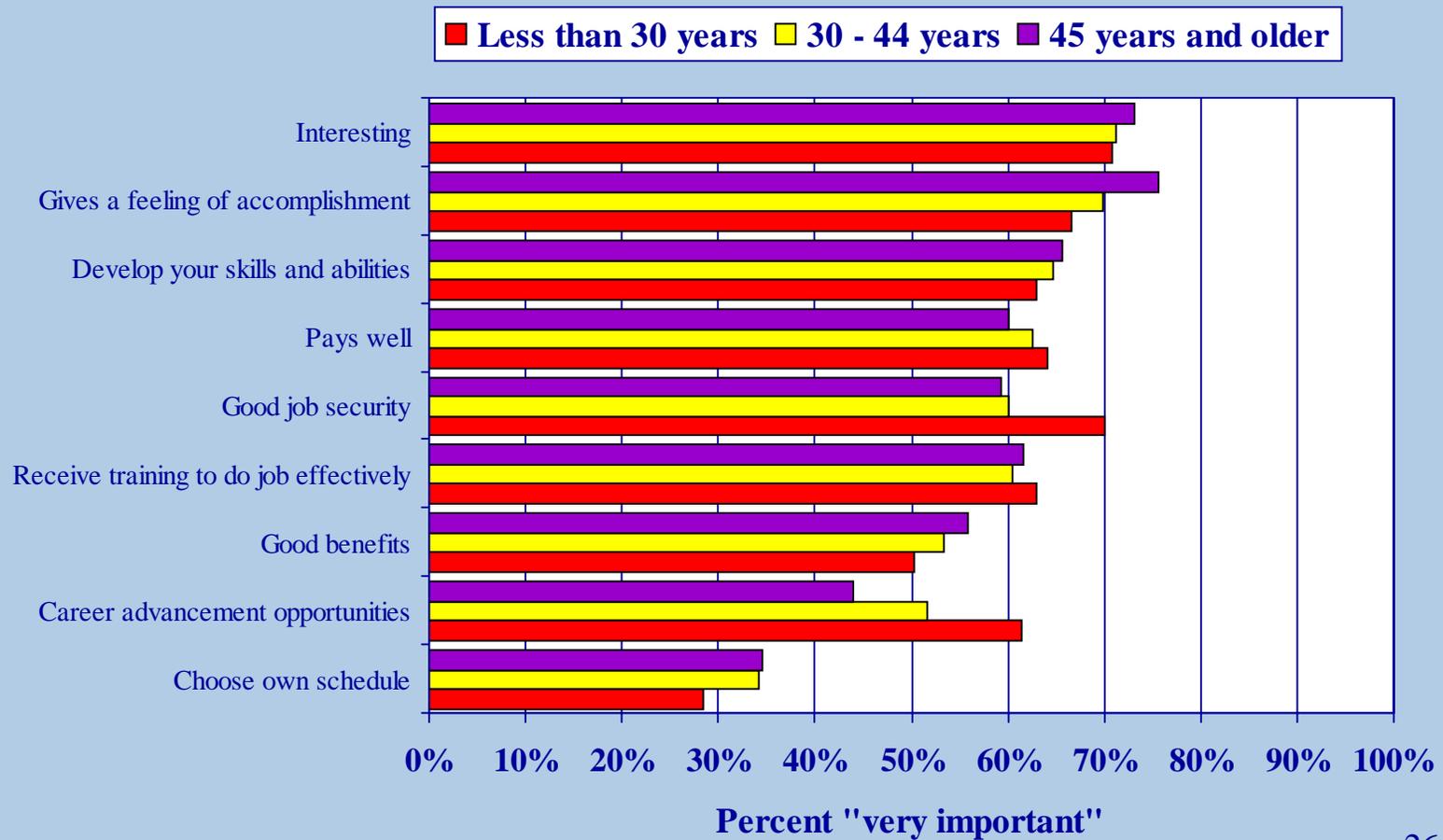
What workers want in a job: are there age differences?

- new data from CPRN's **Changing Employment Relationships** study
- compare 3 age groups: < 30, 30-45, > 45
- age groups are quite similar: interesting work that provides sense of accomplishment is most important
- younger workers place more importance on job security and career advancement opportunities
- in terms of employment relationships, strong emphasis on being treated with respect and having good communications
- younger workers place less importance on commitment



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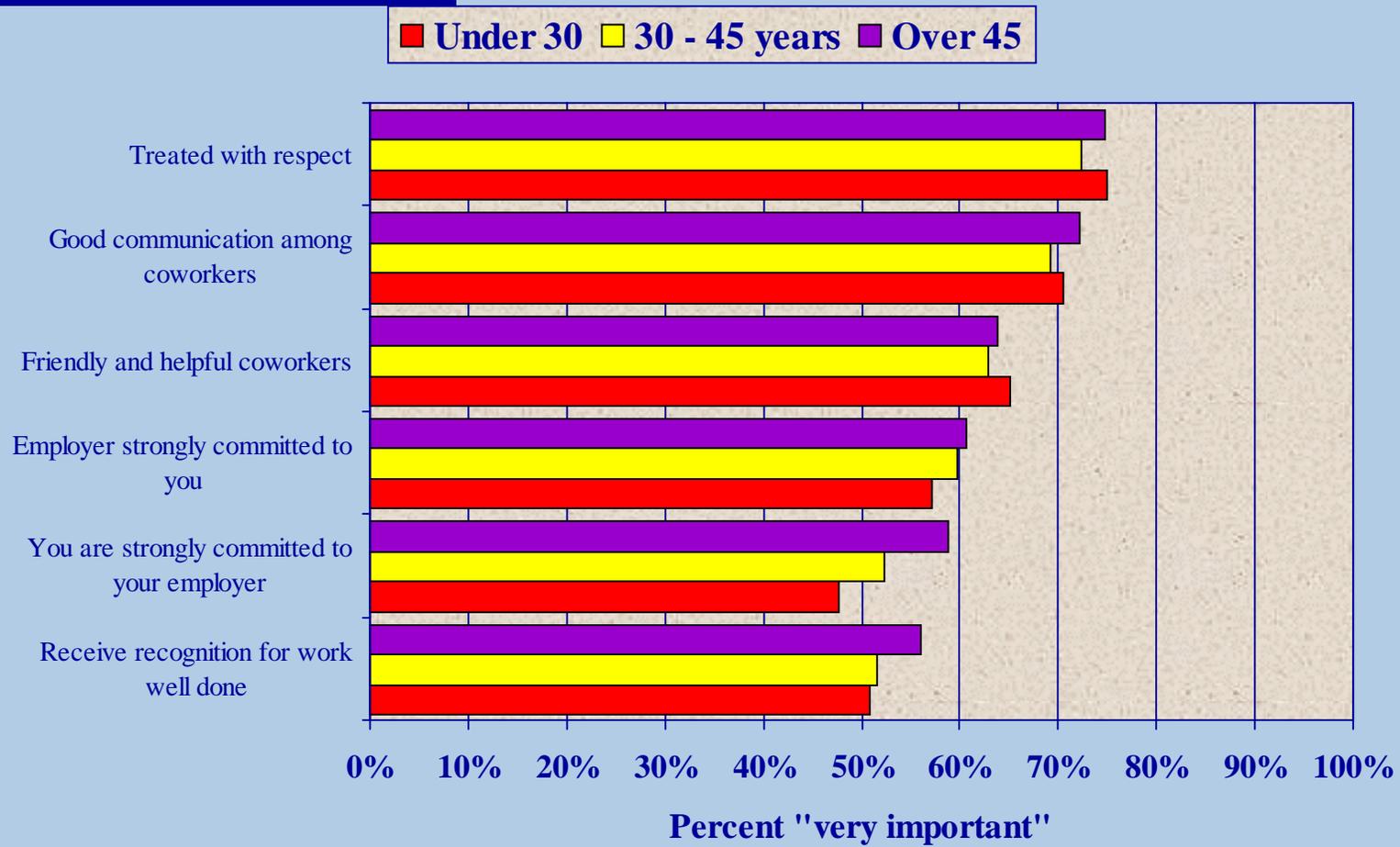
What workers want in a job, by age group, Canada #1: Job rewards and content



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



What workers want in a job, by age group, Canada #2: Employment relationships



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



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Biggest (above average) discrepancies between what workers want and what their job provides

- Opportunity for advancement
- Employer is committed to me ↑
- Benefits are good ↑
- Pay is good
- Can choose schedule
- Balance work and family ↓
- Job security is good
- Receiving training needed

These 'want - have' gaps are wide for workers of all ages. Closing the gaps could positively influence recruitment, retention, and performance.

↑ < 30 bigger gap than 30-45

↓ 30-45 bigger gap than youth

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



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Youth and the future of work

- Now that unemployment is low, we should focus on the quality of jobs, especially entry-level jobs
- There's been too much emphasis so far on the 'supply' of skills, not enough on the demand
- What's best for young workers today will benefit adult workers now and in future
- An individual's education, skills and abilities are the basis for a better quality of life
- Also must address growing social polarization, especially the risks faced by less educated young people from disadvantaged backgrounds
- **A POLICY GOAL:** making people Canada's core asset



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