Gender and Work in the New Economy

February 21, 2003 – The new economy in Canada looks very different to women knowledge workers than it does to their male counterparts.

A study from CPRN's Work Network, published today, provides new evidence on what women and men want in a job and how they are experiencing the transition to a knowledge-based economy. The results are instructive for employers and policy makers developing workplace strategies for the years ahead.

Men's and Women's Quality of Work in the New Canadian Economy, is by Karen Hughes, Professor of Women's Studies, University of Alberta, Graham Lowe, Professor of Sociology, University of Alberta, and Grant Schellenberg, former Director of CPRN's Work Network. The paper draws on data from two recent surveys; the *2000 CPRN-EKOS Changing Employment Relationships Survey* and Statistics Canada's *2000 General Social Survey*.

"Traditional measures like access to jobs and equitable wages suggest we are making progress in closing the "gender gap", says Lowe. "Indeed, there are a number of areas where the experiences of men and women coincide."

The authors call the shortfall between what employees desire and what they actually experience in a job a "job quality deficit". For example, both men and women (70-75%) desire interesting work, but one in seven Canadian workers (14%) say their job is less interesting than they would like. Both genders experience a "job quality deficit" where interesting work is concerned.

In fact, among workers with a high school education or less, both men and women share a number of job quality deficits. Some examples:

- 35-40% say their jobs allow less flexibility to balance work and family than they desire,
- 25% say the level of trust and commitment they experience in their workplace is less than they prefer, and
- 15% say the quality of communication at work falls short of expectations.

"Among workers with post-secondary educations," Lowe says, "it's a different story. A gender gap emerges. Women experience higher job quality deficits than men in a number of areas."

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Among university-educated women,

- one-third report a job-quality deficit in the area of work/family balance,
- one-quarter say commitment and respect on the job falls short of expectations,
- one-quarter receive lower pay, benefits and security than desired, and
- one in seven is dissatisfied with the level of communication in the workplace.

These deficits are significantly higher than those reported by university-educated men.

"What this means," Lowe concludes, "is that female knowledge workers are more likely to experience frustration in finding a job that meets their expectations."

Job quality deficits, and, in particular, the gender nuances in that regard, are especially relevant in the context of an aging workforce and the prospect of a wave of baby-boomer retirements later this decade. As predicted skill shortages emerge, quality of work issues will be decisive for employers who seek to attract and retain skilled employees in an ever more competitive job market.

“As employers look to the future, our ability to grow and continue to be successful is dependent on our ability to attract, retain and motivate talent,” says Annette Verschuren, President of Home Depot Canada. “The findings in this report provide us all with critical clues as to where to focus our human resource initiatives. The fact that the report identifies significant similarities and differences between men and women will enable us to design programs and plans to meet the needs of the workforce of the future, and ensure our success.”

This research received support from Scotiabank, Home Depot Canada and Bell Canada.

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