A Good Job? It's Relationships That Matter Most – Study

May 2, 2001 – Good relationships in the workplace mean even more to job satisfaction than pay or benefits. They are, in fact, the key ingredient of a "good job".

This is a central finding in ***What's a Good Job? The Importance of Employment Relationships***, co-authored by CPRN Work Network Director, Graham Lowe, and Senior Researcher, Grant Schellenberg. The paper, published today, is the final report of CPRN's Changing Employment Relationships Project (CER).

The study is based on a CPRN/Ekos survey of 2,500 employed Canadians and eight focus groups completed last year. It also draws on the literature of industrial relations, psychology, sociology and management.

The traditional, "structural" approach to employment focuses on whether a person works full-time or part-time, is self-employed or an employee, or is in a temporary or permanent position. "Good jobs" have been seen to correspond with "standard employment" – permanent, full-time jobs, with benefits. Temporary, part-time and self employment have been seen as non-standard, and are often regarded as synonymous with "bad jobs".

Lowe and Schellenberg depart from that model.

"By focusing on employment relationships," Lowe says, "we assess the job from the perspective of workers' actual experience. The results are revealing, and lead to a more refined view of what constitutes a 'good job' in the emerging new economy."

"What we find," says Lowe, "is that not all non-standard jobs involve weak employment relationships. Nor do standard jobs necessarily guarantee strong employment relationships."

The authors define employment relationships in terms of their legal basis and in terms of four social/psychological components;

- **Trust** – the expectation that the employer or client will act fairly,
- **Commitment** – an individual's identification with an organization and its goals,
- **Influence** – having a say in the decisions affecting one's work, and
- **Communication** – a clear understanding of one's role, the information needed to perform it, and feedback on how one is doing.

"Most Canadians want satisfying and meaningful work," says Lowe, "and these are the components they seek in a new job."

So, what kind of work environment fosters strong employment relationships?

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“It's a healthy and supportive workplace, with the equipment and training to do the job well,” Lowe says. “And while pay isn't everything, it is important that employees believe they are well paid.”

Why does all this matter?

The results speak for themselves. Strong employment relationships are associated with high job satisfaction, opportunity for skill development, lower turnover, lower absenteeism, higher morale and higher productivity.

“Good employment relationships clearly benefit not only employees, but employers as well,” Lowe emphasizes. “What we provide to employers is a guide for recruiting and retaining a committed and productive workforce in an increasingly competitive job market.”

CPRN President, Judith Maxwell sees Lowe and Schellenberg’s prescription as especially apt for the today’s “learning” economy.

“It would be hard to think of what might equip us better as Canadians to face new global economic realities than trust, commitment, communication and influence,” says Maxwell. “These are qualities ideally suited to maximizing skills, autonomy, and creativity in a rapidly changing environment. They will serve both the workplace and society well.”

You can access or download a copy of the document by clicking here.

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