



Making Job Quality a National Goal

*This past Labour Day, CPRN released a new study, **21st Century Job Quality: Achieving What Canadians Want**, by Graham Lowe. The study urges employers and governments to focus on job quality to recruit and retain the workers needed for Canada's future prosperity. Lowe finds that the economic prosperity of the new century has not resulted in an overall improvement in job quality – even though many Canadian employers are struggling to attract and keep skilled workers. To download a copy of the report, visit www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1745&l=en.*



Graham Lowe

An op-ed prepared by Graham Lowe, which appeared in the online edition of the Globe and Mail on September 5, 2007, is printed below.

Job Quality Stalled as Economy Speeds Ahead

Here's a sobering thought for Labour Day: Despite the economy roaring ahead this decade, the quality of Canadians' jobs hasn't improved. The 21st century has been great for profits and productivity, but what matters to the average Canadian – their quality of work life – is stalled.

Ten years ago, employers dealt workers a harsh hand of downsizing, contracting out, and cost-cutting. Today, those workers hold the trump cards, as unemployment bottoms out and baby boomers transition to their golden years. With so many employers admitting difficulties finding, keeping and engaging employees, the timing would seem perfect to give job quality a higher priority. But this has not been happening.

My research for a Canadian Policy Research Networks report, *21st Century Job Quality: Achieving What Canadians Want*, examined dozens of job quality measures to reach this conclusion. The biggest change since the early 1990s is a 45 percent decline in unemployment.

However, the hiring binge has not increased the proportion of full-time, continuing jobs. Precarious employment persists. While more people work shorter weeks, the longer (more than 40 hours) work week has increased. Employers have been slow to adopt (or offer) flexible hours and schedules, something workers of all generations want. Information technology, and growing concern for the environment, should make telecommuting (at-home work) an easy move, but if this happens at all it usually involves unpaid overtime on evenings and weekends. Basic benefits, notably employer pension plans and supplementary medical insurance, are being cut back.

Some employers are taking steps to manage talent and engage employees, essential in a knowledge-based economy. Yet we don't do enough to use and develop the country's human capital. Close to 1 in 5 workers with university degrees are in jobs that required a high school education or less in 2001, up from the 1990s. And Canada's training record is mediocre, and slipping, compared to other OECD nations.

On the health and safety front, lost-time work injuries are down but workplace fatalities are up. **Sickness absenteeism has climbed in the past decade. Among the likely causes are the work-family pressures and job stress, although surprisingly, the latter is not increasing. Even so, about 3 in 10 Canadians experience high levels of job stress.**

Consistent with stalled job quality, Canadian's job satisfaction has flat-lined. About 1 in 3 Canadians are "very satisfied" with their job. Defining job quality to include 15 ingredients – from pay and benefits to work-life balance, recognition, career opportunities and the nature of the work itself – only about 1 in 5 employees have high job quality on all measures. Big gaps remain for many others, especially in terms of training, trustworthy management, and a healthy and safe environment.

Statistical evidence confirms that employees who have positive work experiences – develop their abilities,



CPRN is a national not-for-profit research institute whose mission is to create knowledge and lead public dialogue and debate on social and economic issues important to the well-being of Canadians, in order to help build a more just, prosperous and caring society.

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feel challenged, make decisions, are heard and recognized – in a healthy and safe environment and are supported by management to succeed will go home with a sense of accomplishment and look forward to returning to work the next day. And they will be more productive because they can learn, contribute and take initiative.

Job quality is a bridge between individual Canadians' quality of work life and economic prosperity. Individuals, employers and society will reap substantial benefits by making better job quality a national goal. Close to 4 in 10 workers are 45 years of age or older, making workforce renewal an urgent priority.

To stimulate action, we need better national job quality measures that give an integrated picture and track progress. A model is the European Working Conditions Survey, conducted in the 25 European Union countries. To prevent employers, and regions, from cannibalizing each others' workforces, employers should raise the national bar for key aspects of job quality – such as flexible work arrangements, open communication, supportive supervision, and health-promoting work environments. We need look no further than the United Kingdom, where management standards in employee development and work stress reduction are being adopted.

These collective steps will help Canadians to achieve the high quality of work life that they want, and deserve, and pave the way for future prosperity.

Graham Lowe is president of The Graham Lowe Group, a workplace consulting firm. He also is a professor emeritus at the University of Alberta and a research associate at Canadian Policy Research Networks. He can be reached at glowe@grahamlowe.ca.

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Inclusion and Social Housing Practice

*CPRN Intern Joël Thibert's paper, **Inclusion and Social Housing Practice in Canadian Cities**, comments on the design aspects of social inclusion in social housing. The paper is available on CPRN's website.*

Thibert describes and analyzes the policy, planning and design processes that led to the creation of three recent socially-mixed projects in the regions of Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto. There is general agreement that social inclusion, the mix of market-rate and subsidized units, is important for social housing sustainability. It is also acknowledged that the design of socially-mixed projects is generally more complex. Yet, we do not know how good design outcomes come about in practice.



This paper first explores the similarities and differences in the planning and design of the projects based on site visits and an analysis of each project's design. The policy context and design process that led to each project are also reconstructed. A synthesis of the three cases reveals that there are common "ingredients" in their planning and design. The paper recommends that local

governments take an active role in ensuring a "proper mix" without using coercive regulatory measures. Thibert also suggests the experience of providers and consultants should be considered in project selection and preserved for future projects.

Sustaining Ontario's Subsidized Housing

*CPRN Intern Sally Turner examined the relationship between non-profit organizations and social housing in her research report on Toronto social housing projects, **Sustaining Ontario's Subsidized Housing by Supporting Non-Profit Organizations**. The full report is available on our website.*

The focus of funding affordable housing has shifted. By concentrating funding on new developments to reduce the shortage of affordable housing in Ontario's cities, we are no longer able to address the long-term viability of existing projects. As a result, when existing developments run into financial difficulty, government funding programs are not in place to ensure we do not lose valuable affordable housing stock to bankruptcy. Turner's paper underlines the importance of non-profit housing providers to Toronto's

social housing system and uses suggestions from the organizations themselves to better understand the support they need.

Over 100 organizations supply subsidized housing in Toronto. The paper demonstrates that local authorities are the best level of governance to co-ordinate the providers, but that more flexible funding and support is needed. Currently, funding only addresses a proportion of tenant's rents, under the *Social Housing Reform Act* (SHRA). However non-profit providers have been facing increasing operational costs as they take on increasing responsibility for supplying Ontario's subsidized housing. This should be taken into consideration by government funding schemes.

The paper shows that the Ontario government can help by loosening SHRA regulations to allow greater funding flexibility to non-profit providers. The federal government needs to increase its spending on housing, giving municipalities the financial freedom to provide flexible funding that allows non-profits to cover operational costs that vary greatly between organizations providing different types of housing and related services. Overall, greater communication is needed between all levels of governance and non-profit providers to better tailor programs to their unique needs.

CPRN's JobQuality.ca Attracts Record Visitors

More than 750,000 people have visited CPRN's jobquality.ca website, a one-stop, free information source for quality of employment and the state of Canadian



workplaces, since its launch in July 2001.

"The site has user-friendly information on the quality of jobs in

Canada," says Ron Saunders, CPRN Vice-President of Research. "It also provides tools for employers to provide a work environment that facilitates the recruitment and retention of employees."

User highlights include:

- 190,000 visitors between September 2006 and July 2007
- 17,000 visitors each month, a 16% increase in average monthly visitors since last year.
- Over 20,800 visitors in March 2007, the 2nd highest number of monthly visitors in six years.

The website features:

- Data on what Canadians value in a job and how well their jobs match up, based on survey results;

- Information on wages and benefits, trust and commitment, employee participation, skill use and development, and work-life balance;
- Interviews with labour market and human resource experts;
- News stories about job quality;
- Comparisons across industries and regions; and
- Data on how Canada compares on a range of job quality indicators.

The website is being expanded. "We plan to make greater use of on-line surveys to gather input from visitors on their perceptions and experiences of job quality," says Saunders.

Current jobquality.ca sponsors include Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry; Bell Canada Inc.; and the Canadian Labour Congress.

To connect, visit www.jobquality.ca.

Dr. Ron Saunders Appointed CPRN Vice-President Research

Dr. Ron Saunders has been appointed CPRN Vice-President Research, effective August 17, 2007. Ron will provide leadership in the development of CPRN's overall research agenda and in the creation of the research projects under its new research framework, which is being developed.



Ron joined CPRN in January 2003 heading its Work Network. He became Director of Work and Learning earlier this year. Prior to joining CPRN, Ron served in the Ontario Public Service, which he joined in 1984. From 1998 to 2002 he was Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy, Communications, and Labour Management Services Division, at the Ontario Ministry of Labour.

Ron holds a Ph.D. in Economics from Harvard University, specializing in industrial organization and international trade. He taught for some years at the University of Toronto before joining the Ontario Public Service and more recently he taught at the Queen's University School of Policy Studies (2001-2002). Ron has worked on a wide range of labour market issues and has served on committees at the International Labour Organization and in federal-provincial initiatives.

To read Ron's publications, visit www.cprn.org/people.cfm?person=137&l=en.

President's Commentary

Partners for Better Social Housing Policy

Walking from Union Station in Toronto to the King and Bay financial district one literally steps over homeless people lying across the grates on the sidewalk. Seemingly no one flinches or stops to listen to the stories of these Canadians. It is a dehumanizing experience for everyone – for those avoiding the homeless or for the person living on the streets of Canada's biggest city.

How did we get here? What can be done to solve the seemingly intractable problem of homelessness?

Michel Sereacki, one of five CPRN Housing interns, argues in his paper "*Fostering Better Integration and Partnerships for Housing in Canada*" that complex problems need flexible solutions and partnerships. When the problem is multi-level and multi-jurisdictional, there is no easy solution. Collaborative partnerships with communities, community organizations and other levels of government with multiple departments involved are expensive to operate and complex to manage for results. However, this partnership approach is exactly what is needed to create sustainable solutions to problems like the need for more social housing that involve multiple jurisdictions.

Better social housing policy requires ongoing multi-level partnership. CPRN has successfully partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit of York University, the Social Housing Services Corporation of Ontario (SHSC), the City of Ottawa and Infrastructure Canada to conduct policy research on affordable housing in Ontario. We believe this model can be used in addressing Canada's social housing needs.

In addition to Michael Sereacki's research, CPRN's interns have addressed:

- the design aspects of social inclusion in social housing (Joël Thibert);
- the relationship between non-profit organizations and social housing (Sally Turner);
- city-regions and affordable housing (Leonore Evans); and
- social lives in social housing (Jeff May).

The interns collaborated with our Ontario partners to gain insight into the practical problems facing people living and working in social housing. The interns shared their research at a conference with Ontario Municipal Social Services Workers in September.

A synthesis paper based on the five studies and authored by CPRN's Nathalie Pierre will bring

together the findings and identify practical policy options. All papers will be posted this fall on CPRN's website, www.cprn.org.

What difference does a partnership like this make?

Multiple partners enable us to leverage funding to produce a research program in social housing policy. CPRN is able to develop policy capacity in the social housing policy field. We can provide experience and insight on a much richer and broader scale through partnerships. Most important, we share the knowledge learned with a wider set of contacts, where it matters most – policy decision-makers at all levels, from Queen's Park to the housing manager in Windsor.

This partnership experience has been satisfying for all parties. Young scholars produced and shared their policy research while honing their research and analytical skills. CPRN developed new talent and contributed ideas. York University promulgated research in social housing policy while the City of Ottawa and Infrastructure Canada gained by moving from a single question on affordable housing to a suite of policy research results. SHSC, who have supported the development of new knowledge and budding scholars in the social housing arena, gained important policy analysis and information.

The characteristics of this partnerships' success have been flexible and adaptive partners; the ability to make quick decisions in support of the project; mutual respect; and management by CPRN of the partnership details.

Evolving partnerships are the hallmark of future public policy research. As CPRN moves forward, we will be bringing our strengths in policy research and partnership to a wider array of complex social problems that Canada faces.

Thanks to our partners!

Sharon Manson Singer, Ph.D.
President



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