

Identifying the Building Blocks of a Healthy Health Care Work Environment

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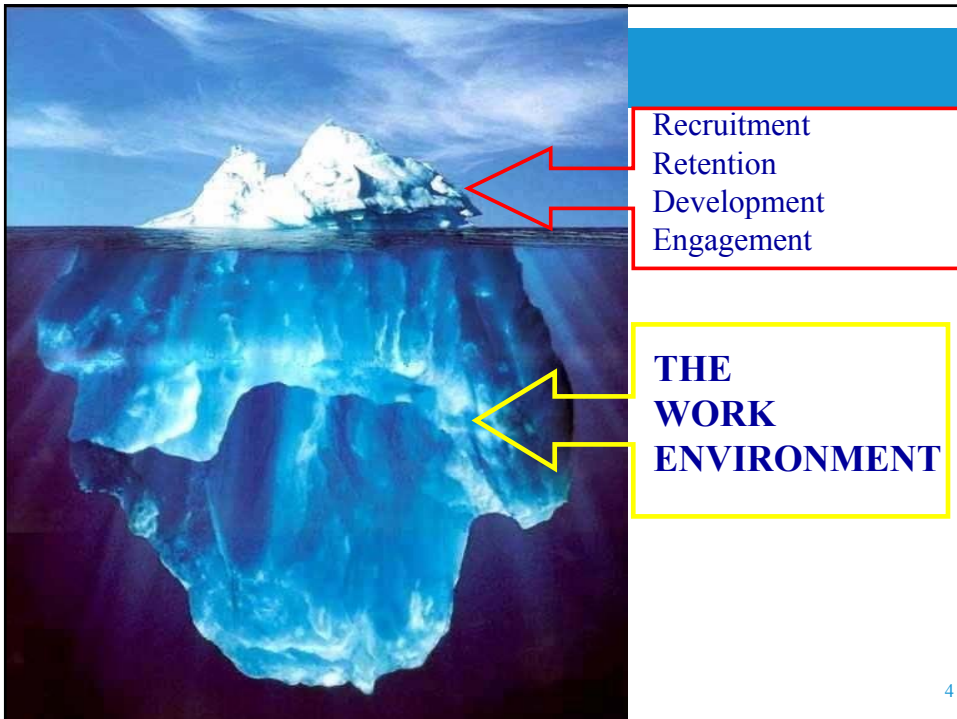
Three key questions...

-  **What are the building blocks of high quality of work environments?**
-  **How does a high quality work environment benefit employees, employers and clients?**
-  **What practical lessons and guiding principles for action does the research offer?**

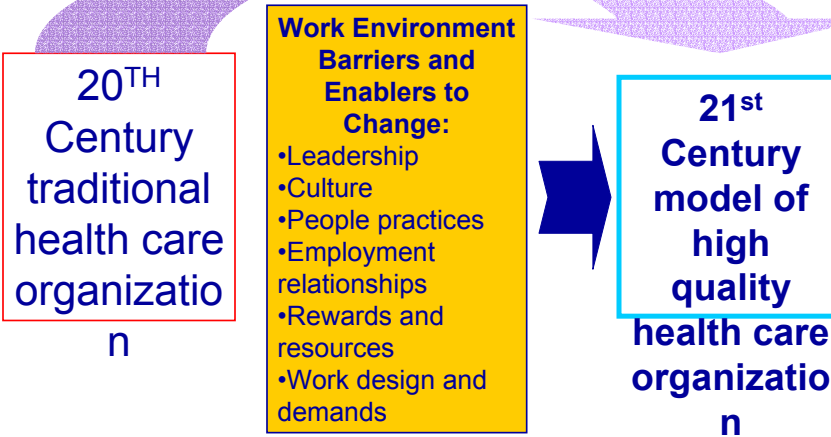
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Why focus on the work environment?



The work environment is the key to organizational renewal



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What matters for workers...

- At numerous workshops and talks, workers tell me that a good workplace depends on:
 - Contribution
 - Development
 - People
 - Values and culture
 - Workload
 - Communication
 - Rewards

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Research backs this up

- **When asked what they considered important in a job, Canadian workers give high priority to:**
 - **Respect**
 - **Interesting work**
 - **Good communication**
 - **Sense of accomplishment**
 - **Work-family balance**
 - **Develop skills and abilities**
- **Work environments impact all these factors**
- **Not meeting these expectations costs employers**

Source: WWW.JOBQUALITY.CA

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Barriers to
improving the
work environment

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Work intensification

- 📄 Long or 'non-standard' work hours, inflexible schedules, rising workloads and performance expectations
- 📄 The employment contract has been redefined: 110% effort
- 📄 Work pressures threaten organizational sustainability

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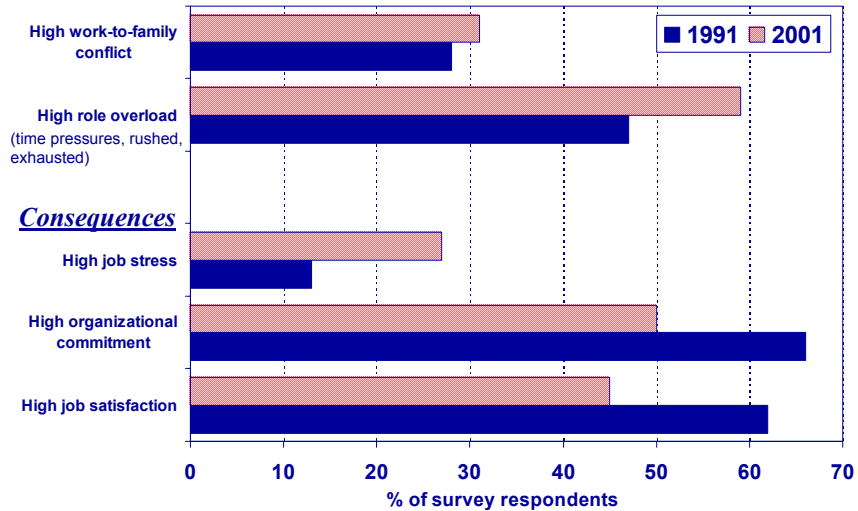
This has consequences for...

- health
- productivity
- work-life balance
- absenteeism
- turnover
- morale
- learning and skills

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Rising work - family conflict

Work-family balance



Source: L. Duxbury and C. Higgins, *Work - Life Balance in the New Millennium* (www.cprn.org)

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Employment relationships depend on the work environment

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The importance of employment relationships

- **Four underlying dimensions of employment relationships:**
 - 📄 **trust**
 - 📄 **commitment**
 - 📄 **communication**
 - 📄 **influence**
- **These are key ingredients of a ‘good job’**

See: G. Lowe and G. Schellenberg, *What's A Good Job? The Importance of Employment Relationships* (www.cprn.org)

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Work environments shape employment relationships

- Strong employment relationships depend on a healthy and supportive work environment
- Organizational change (downsizing, restructuring) weakens employment relationships

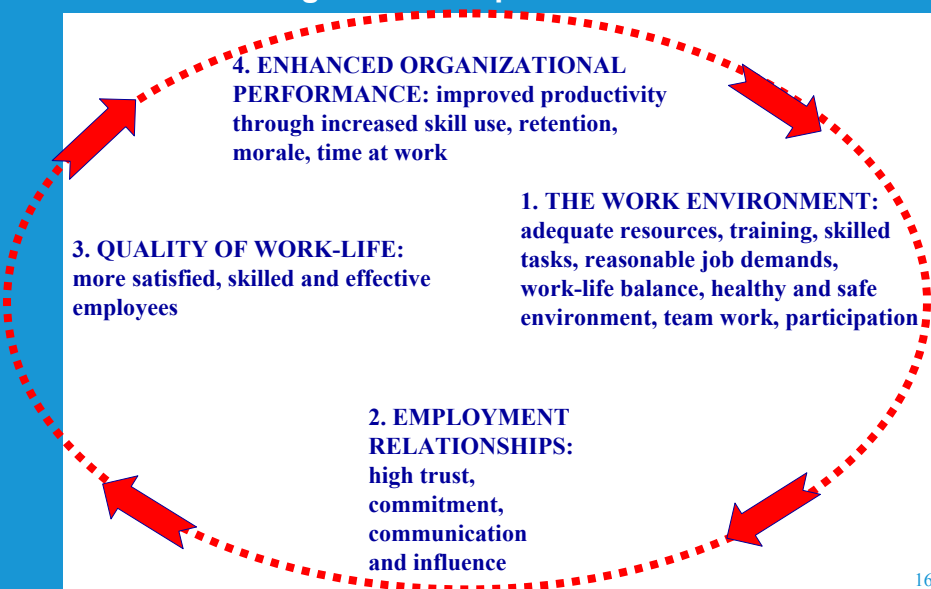
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Benefits of strong employment relationships

- higher job satisfaction
- higher workplace morale
- better skill development and use
- lower turnover
- better use of employees' skills

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How employment relationships impact the quality of work life and organizational performance



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Focusing on
health care
workplaces

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Benchmarking health

- Compared to other occupations, health professionals have:
 - Lowest level of trust in their employer
 - Lowest level of commitment to their employer
 - Lowest ratings of workplace communication
 - Least influence on workplace decisions
 - Least supportive and healthy workplaces

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Unique features of the health care sector

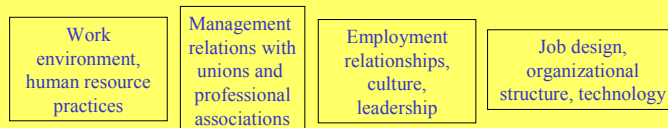
- ☞ Strong political and public pressures
- ☞ Complex governance
- ☞ Highly unionized
- ☞ Diversity of employment relationships, occupations/professions, organizational forms
- ☞ Technology and knowledge intensive
- ☞ Staff shortages
- ☞ Constant change and restructuring

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Components of a high-quality health care workplace

Environmental Pressures:

- Fiscal constraints
- Aging workforce, labour shortages, social change
- Complex regulatory and governance structures
- Rapid turnover in political leadership








Outcomes for the organization, employees, patients

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Costs of inaction #1







For workers, low-quality health care work environments contribute to:

-  Interpersonal tensions
-  Reduced job satisfaction
-  Work-family conflict
-  Occupational injuries
-  Reduced physical and mental health

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Costs of inaction #2

For the organization and its clients:

-  Reduced job performance
-  Increased absenteeism
-  Turnover
-  Reduced commitment and trust
-  Demoralized work climate
-  Reduced quality of patient care

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Creating great places to work

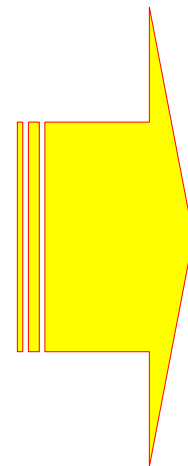
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The old workplace

THE DECLINING BUREAUCRATIC WORKPLACE

- multi-layered, rigid hierarchy
- top-down chain of command
- narrow job descriptions
- lots of routine tasks
- driven by rules and regulations
- training
- some vertical career mobility
- work environment low priority



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The new workplace

THE EMERGING FLEXIBLE WORKPLACE

- flatter, fluid organization
- employee participation & autonomy
- information sharing
- team work
- skilled and knowledge-intensive jobs
- learning
- horizontal and spiral careers
- healthy, supportive work environment

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Convergent thinking on creating great places to work



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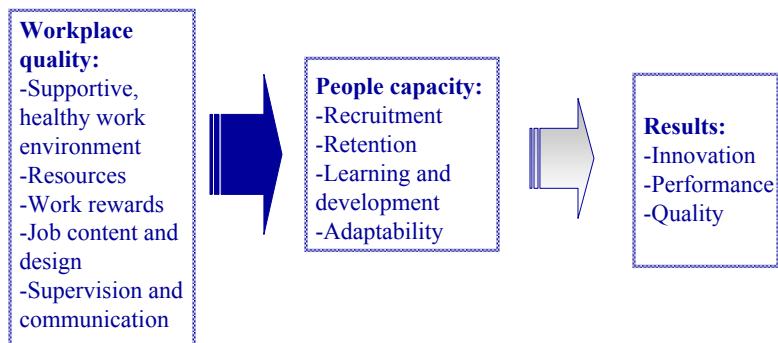
The Healthy Organization

- This model links improved health outcomes for employees and improved organizational performance
- Balances customer expectations, organizational goals, employee skills and health needs
- Requires an interdisciplinary, collaborative approach to workplace change
- Good fit for health care workplaces because it uses population health thinking

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Treating people as assets, not costs

Here's how high quality workplaces help people deliver good results:



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Action checklist for employers

- 📄 **Employees are at the core of values and mission**
- 📄 **Work environment goals are in business plans**
- 📄 **Accountability and incentives for treating people as assets**
- 📄 **Employees, unions and professional associations are involved in the change process**
- 📄 **Progress is measured and communicated**
- 📄 **Continuously build on strengths, close gaps**

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You can be a change agent

- Focus on your 'sphere of influence'
- Communicate why changes are 'urgent'
- Identify opportunities for improvement
- Build on successes and existing initiatives
- Build networks and coalitions for
 - learning
 - resource sharing
 - action

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