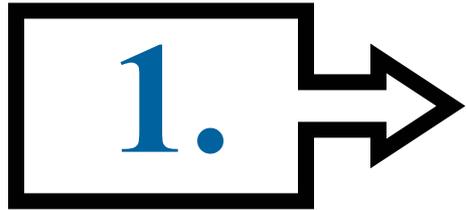


Healthy work environments: Canada's Next Big Idea

Graham S. Lowe, Ph.D.

**Nachemson Lecture, Institute for Work & Health
21 June 2004, Toronto**

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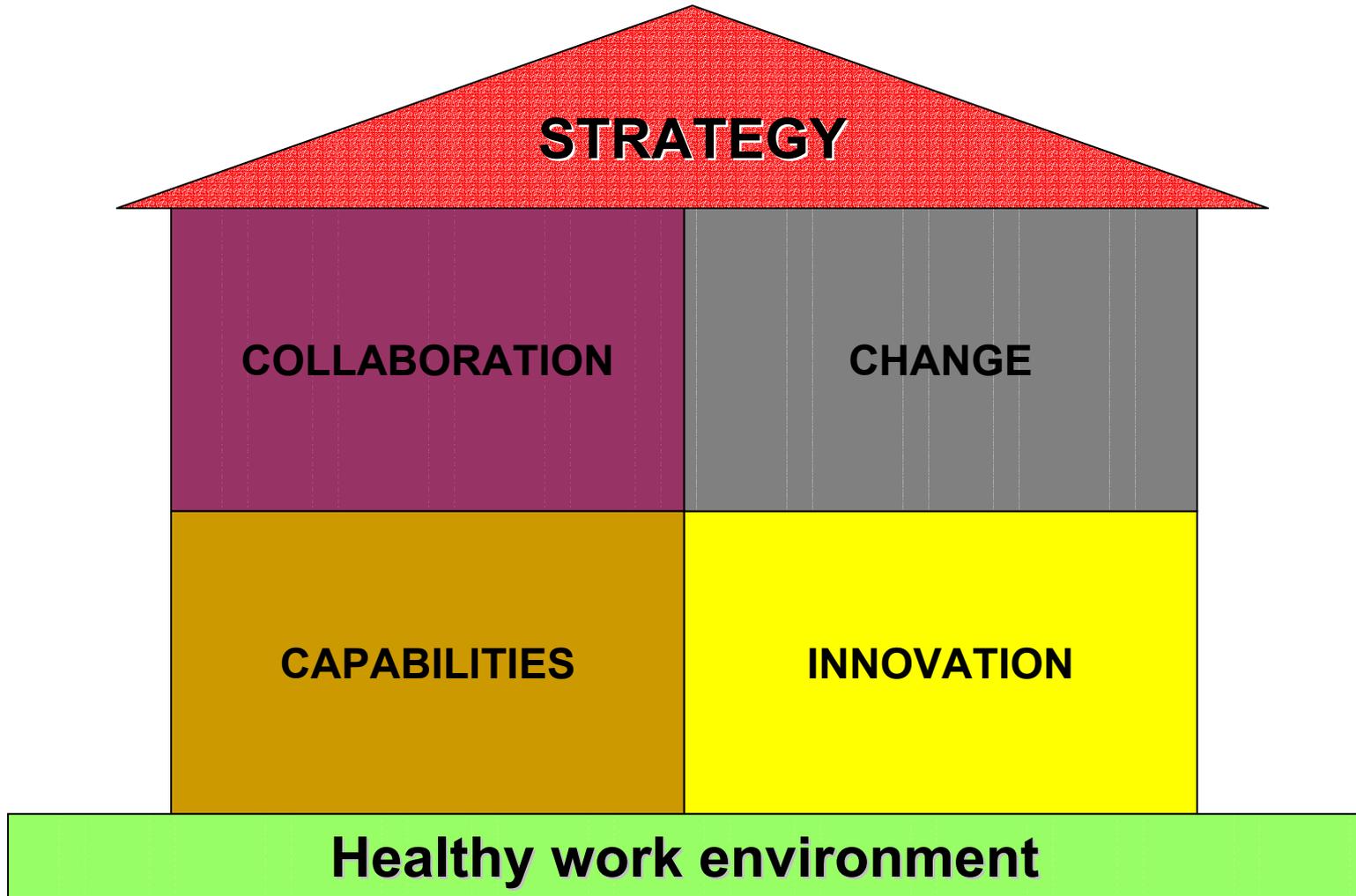


The big idea

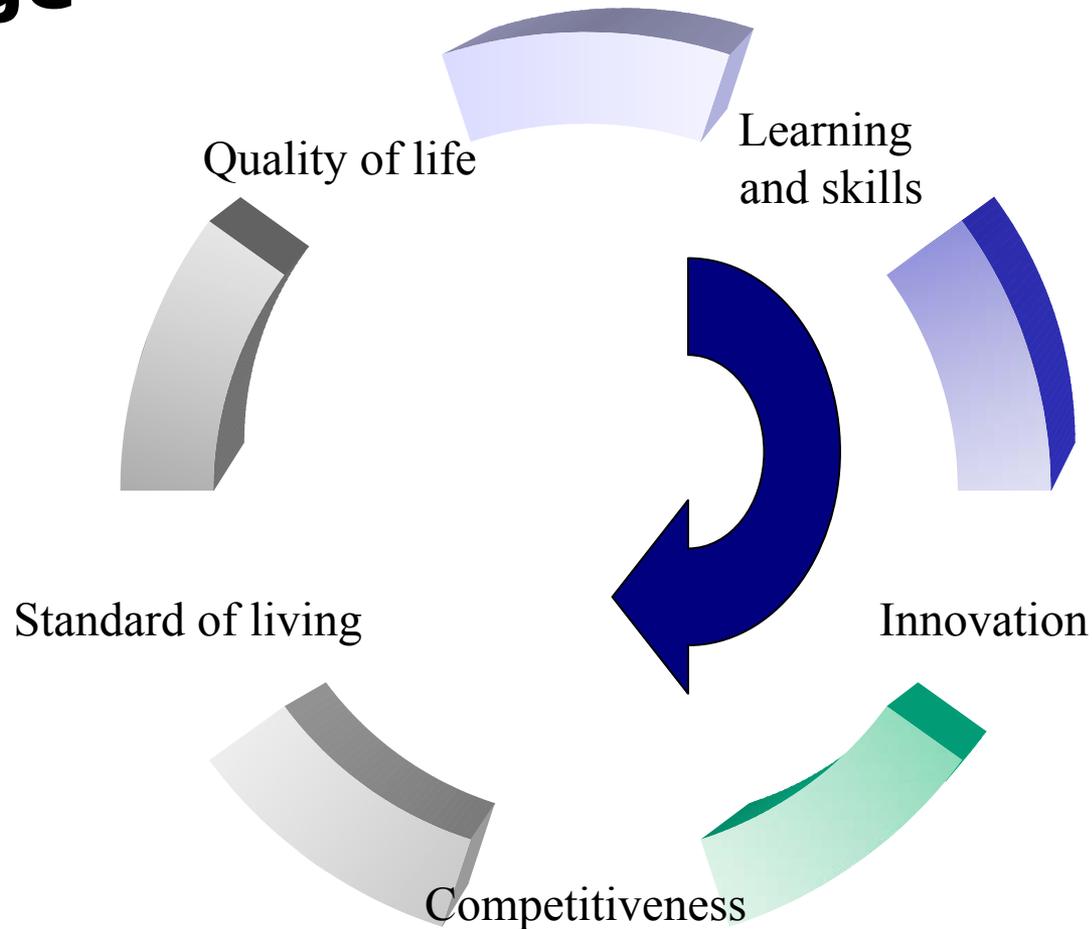
Moving health and productivity to a higher level

- **Build** on workplace health promotion successes
- **Learn** from gaps
- **Expand** the scope of individual behaviours and attitudes
- **Create** enabling contexts

Healthy organization

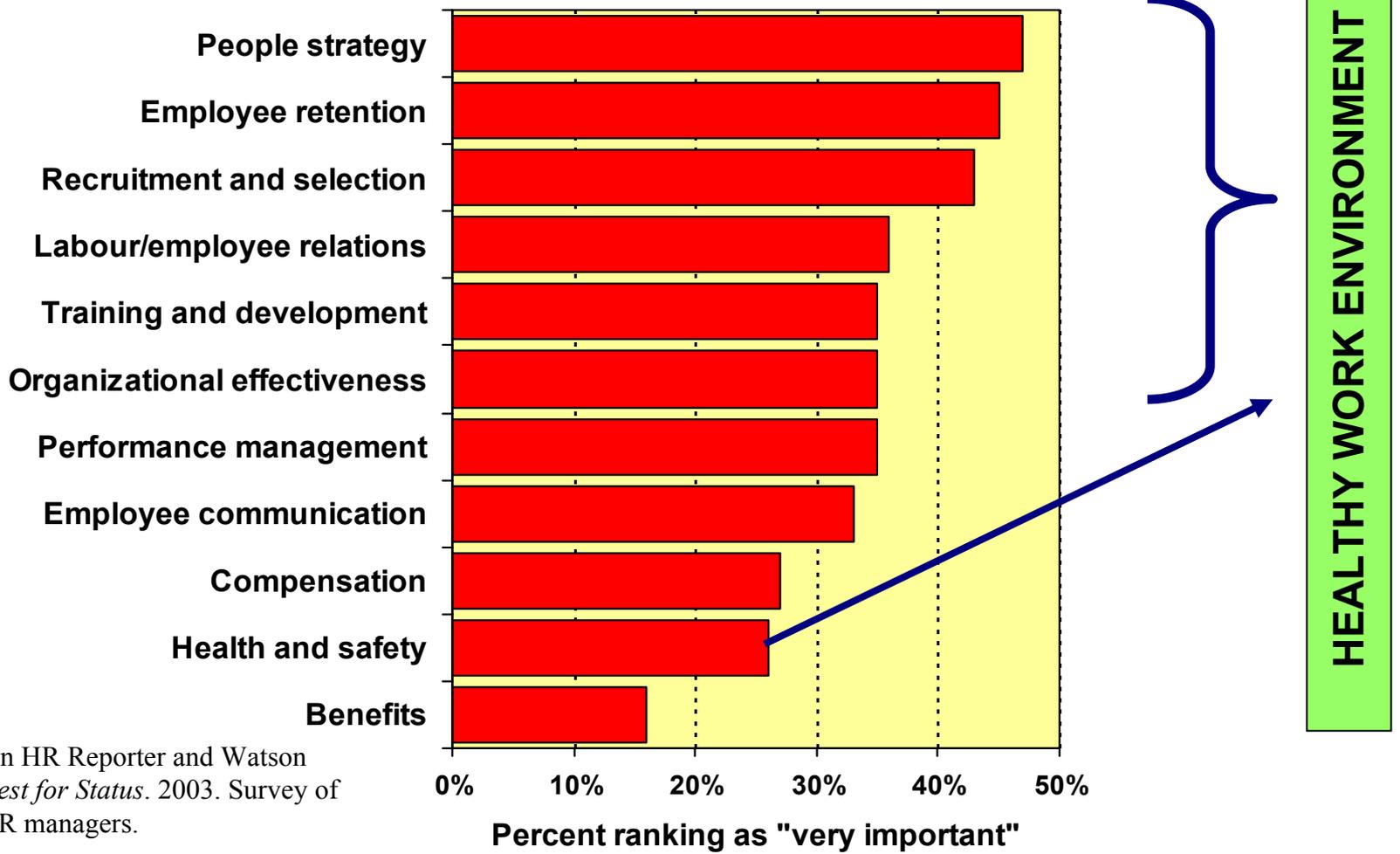


Knowledge economy



Source: *Knowledge Matters. Skills and Learning for Canadians*, HRDC, 2002

HR managers' perceptions of HR's contribution to organization strategy



Source: Canadian HR Reporter and Watson Wyatt, *HR's Quest for Status*. 2003. Survey of 500 Canadian HR managers.

What workers want

- 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

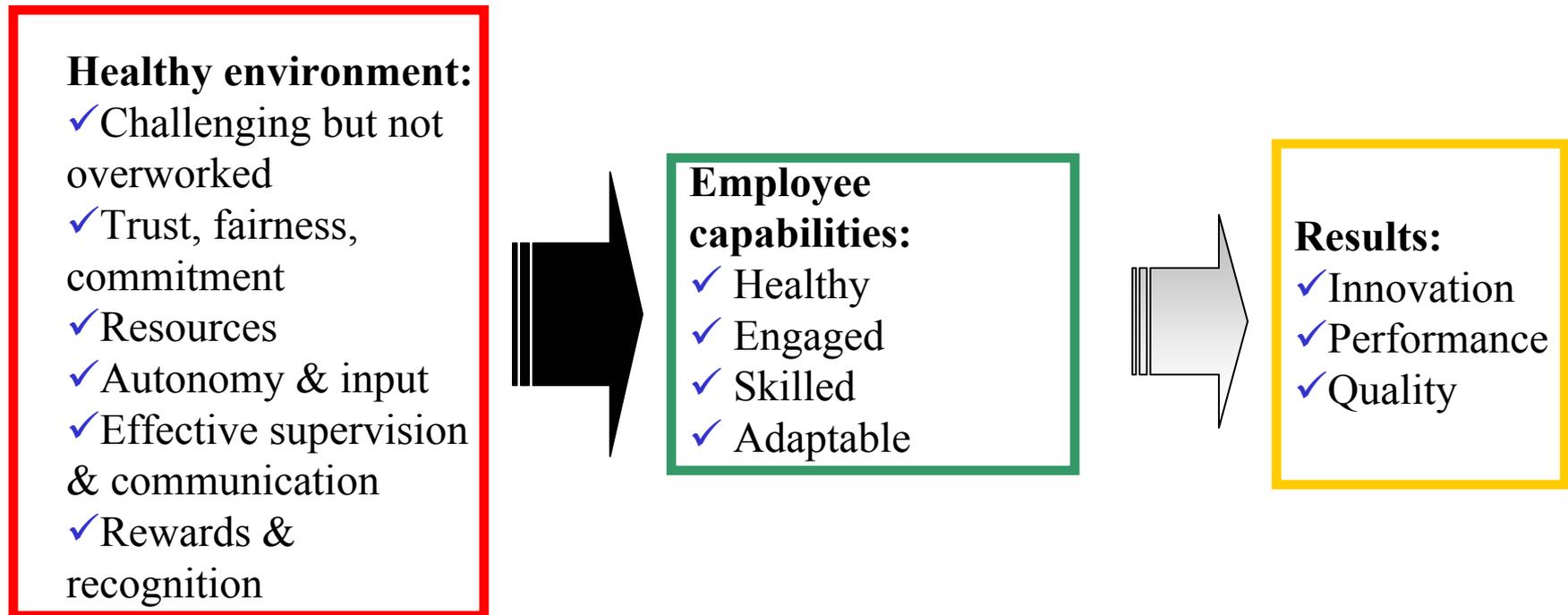
See: G. Lowe and G. Schellenberg, "Employees' basic value proposition: Strong HR strategies must address work values," *Canadian HR Reporter* (15 July 2002): 18, 23.

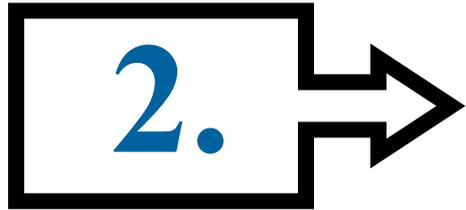
Convergent thinking



The logic of a healthy work environment

Here's how a healthy work environment, employee capabilities, and organizational effectiveness are linked:





Capabilities

Talent drives performance

“The fundamental premise of high performance management systems is that organizations perform at a higher level when they are able to tap the ideas, skill, and effort of all their people.”

Jeffrey Pfeffer, *The Human Equation: Building Profits by Putting People First*. HBS Press, 1998. p. 90.

Leverage existing talent

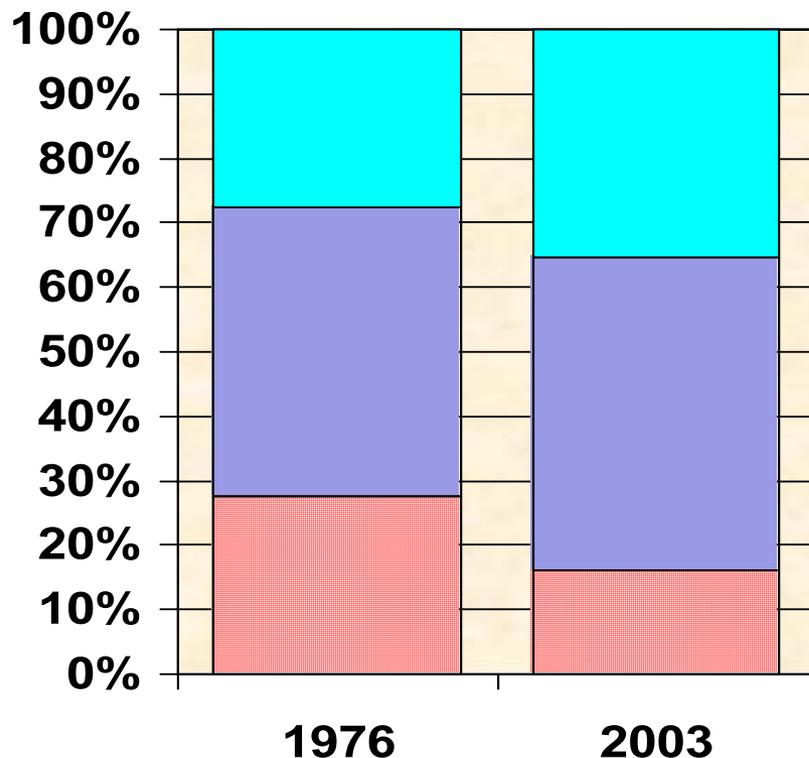
- New goal: maximize the use of all existing talent...
 - 25% of workers report that their education, skills and experience are not used in their job
- Work environments must enable the continuous *use and development* of skills



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Demographic pressures to accelerate knowledge transfer and learning

15-24 yrs 25-44 yrs 45+ yrs



- Early Baby Boomers reach 60 in 2006
- Succession planning must encourage knowledge transfer
- Continuous learning to meet future skill needs

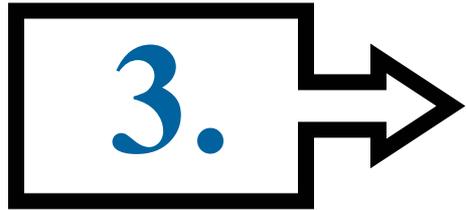
Source: Calculated from Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey

Labour force

Rethinking retirement

- Employers can't hire their way out of labour shortages
- What would encourage baby-boomers to continue working?
- Would healthier work environments be a major incentive?





Innovation

Learning organizations = healthy workplaces

- Knowledge and intellectual capital as core assets
- Human Resource Management practices and work environments that support learning also define a healthy workplace
- Thomas Stewart (*Intellectual Capital, 1997*): knowledge management is about connection, not collection
- Being too busy at work is the most common barrier to job-related training (Statistics Canada, *Perspectives on Labour and Income, Summer 2002*)

Involvement and innovation

Employee Involvement:

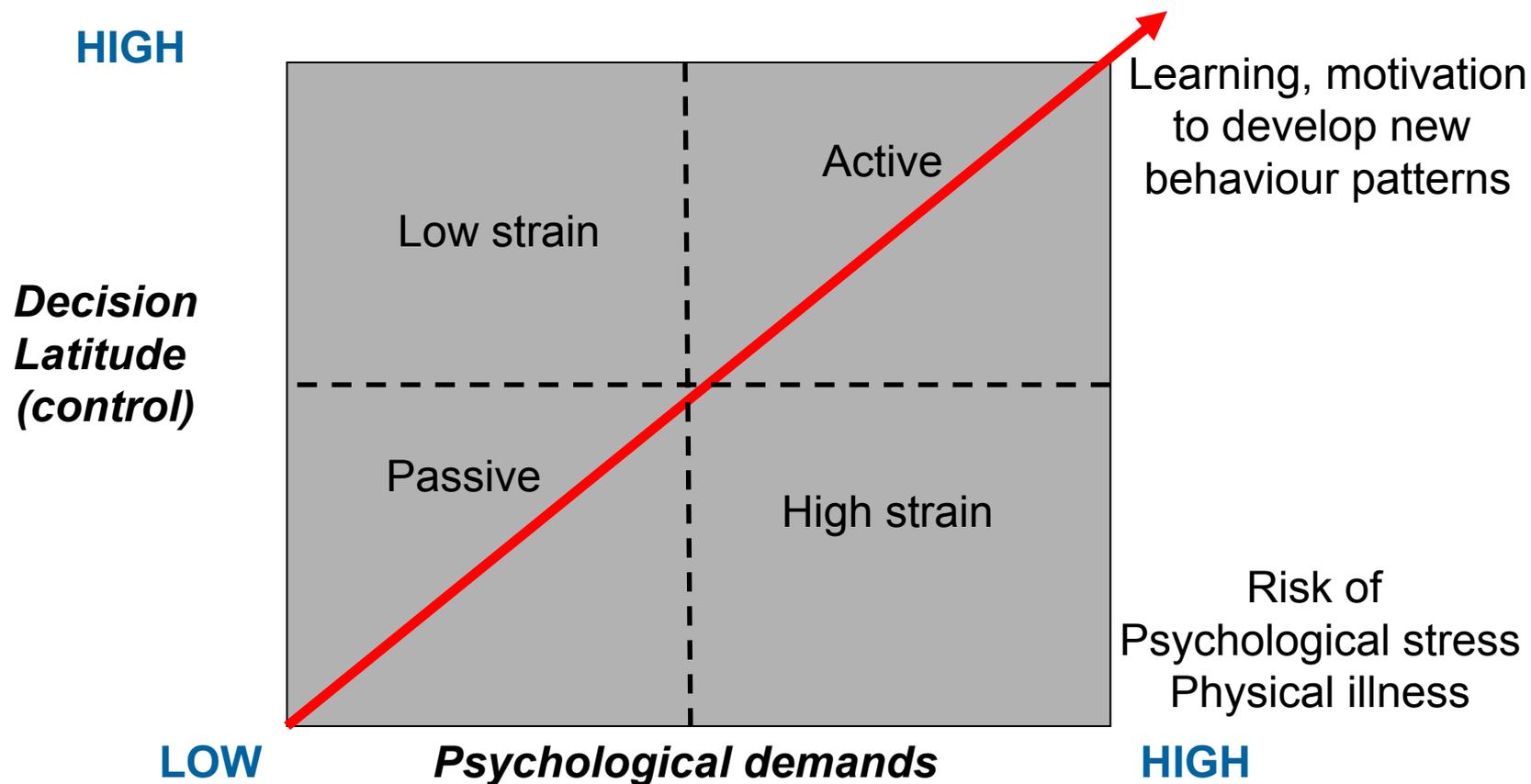
- Information sharing
- Flexible job design
- Teams
- Suggestion programs
- Surveys
- Joint labour-management committees

Benefits EI & HRM bundles:

- Innovation in services or products
- Higher job satisfaction

Source: Statistics Canada, *1999 Workplace and Employee Survey*.

Demands, control and stress



Source: R. Karasek, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1979; Parker and Wall, *Job and Work Design*.

The long arm of the job

- Job and workplace conditions affect how workers think and act on and off the job
- Individuals who participate in cognitively challenging work activities become:
 - more self-directed
 - intellectually motivated
 - cognitively flexible
- The key is self-directed work: autonomy, independent judgment, complex, non-routine

Source: research by Melvin Kohn, Carmi Schooler, Martin Meissner and others

Managing in the 21st century

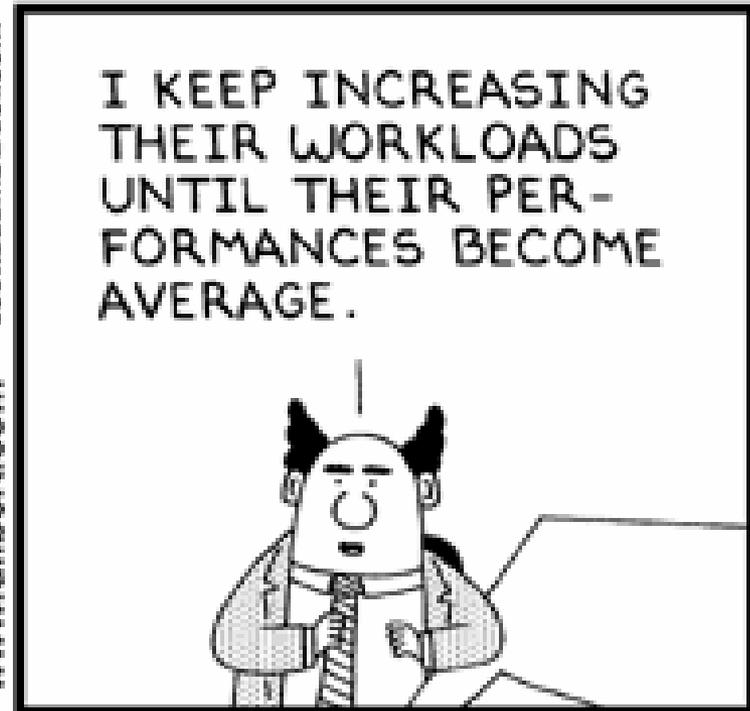
Peter Drucker:

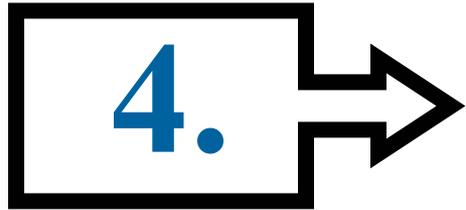
- Knowledge workers must be treated as assets, not costs
- Their work must enable continuous innovation, learning and teaching
- Traditional approaches to people management are not effective

Reducing capabilities



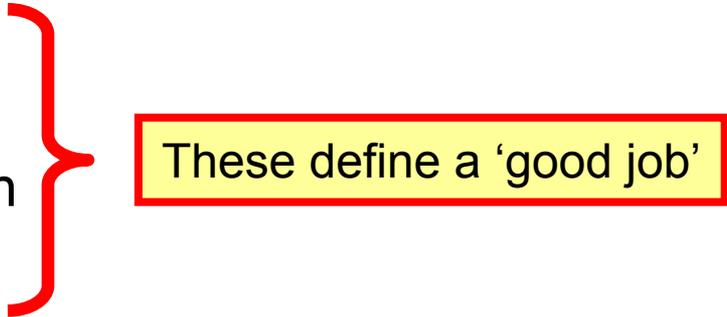
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Collaboration

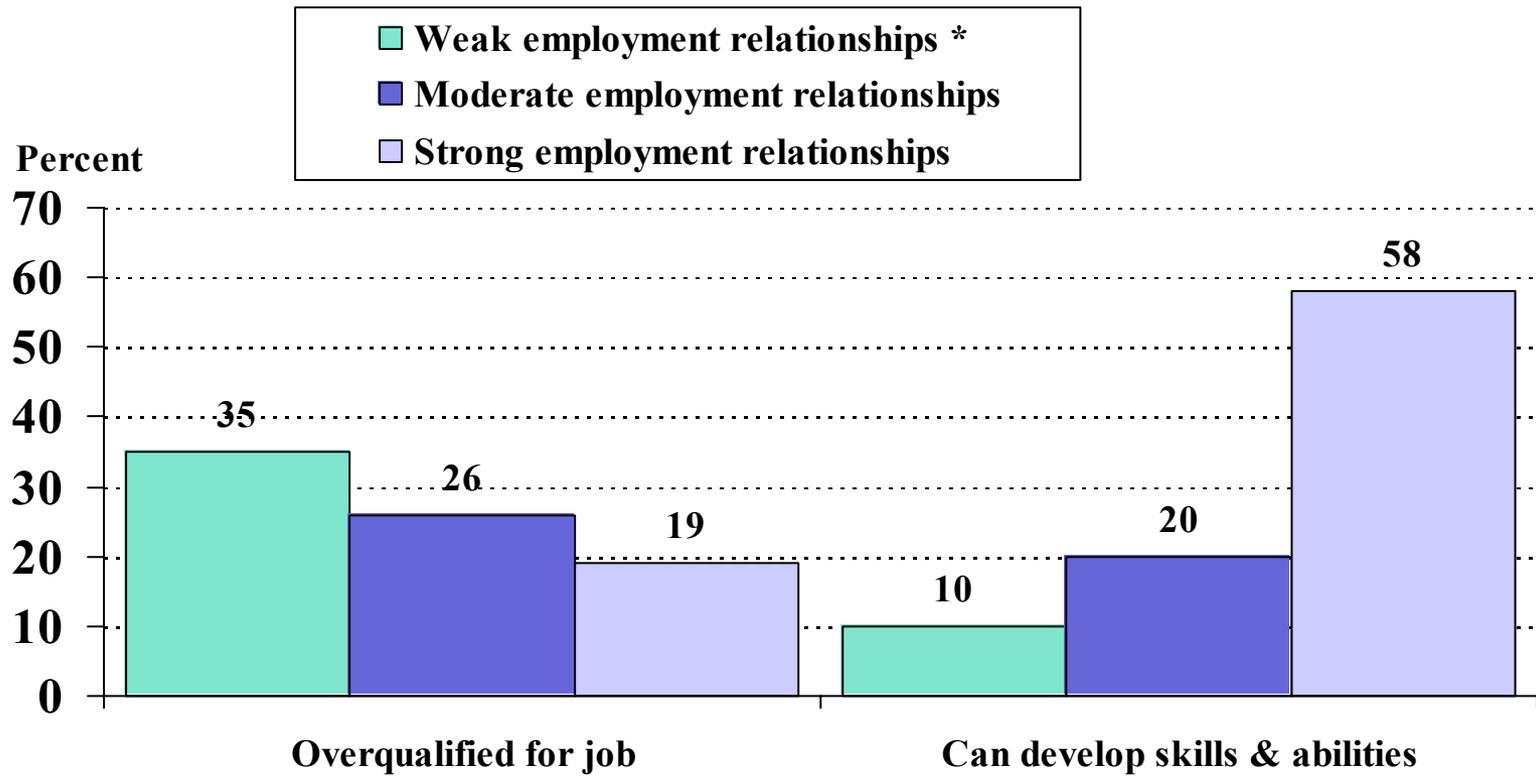
Working together

- Four dimensions of work relationships:
 1. trust
 2. commitment
 3. communication
 4. influence

These define a 'good job'
- Affects morale, satisfaction, turnover, absenteeism, skill use and development
- Strengthened by a healthy and supportive environment

See: G. Lowe and G. Schellenberg, *What's a Good Job? The Importance of Employment Relationships*, Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2001.

Employment relationships nurture talent



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

Employees' perceptions of a healthy work environment

BIGGEST POSITIVE IMPACT:

- Good communication and supportive relationships
 - communication
 - co-workers
 - supervisor
 - recognition

OUTCOMES:

- job satisfaction
- commitment
- morale
- lower absenteeism
- lower turnover

Source: G. Lowe, G. Schellenberg, H. Shannon, "Correlates of employees' perceptions of a healthy work environment." *American Journal of Health Promotion*, July/August 2003.

Values

- Values are the cornerstone of a healthy organization
- Fairness, respect and honesty are upper-most in employees' minds as key workplace values
- Contribute to a 'psychologically healthy workplace'
- At the core of corporate social responsibility
- Build trust

Trust

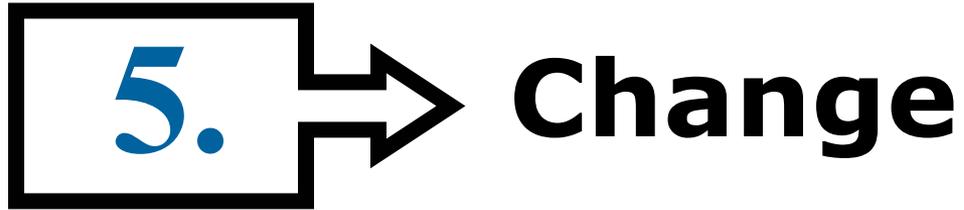
Employees trust managers who:

- Are concerned about their well-being
- Listen and respond to their input
- Are open and honest about change
- Consistently act the values

Trust, learning and performance

- Workplace learning is a key feature of High Performance Work Systems
 - high trust and involvement
 - make better use of all workers' intelligence, skills and creativity
 - engage all employees in seeking ways to improve performance
- "Employees have to feel secure enough to experiment and try new behaviours and learn from mistakes."
- Trust is a precondition for feeling secure

Source: D. Ashton and J. Sung, *Supporting Workplace Learning for High Performance Work*. Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2002.



5. → **Change**

Unhealthy change

Employees who survived downsizing experienced:

- Increased job demands and job insecurity
- Decreased job control
- Increased sickness absenteeism (permanent staff)
- Increased presenteeism (temp staff)
- Increased risk of cardiovascular disease

Source: J. Vahtera et al., "Organizational downsizing, sickness absence, and mortality: 10-town prospective cohort study." *BMJ*, 2004.

Silent killers

- “Doctors call high cholesterol a ‘silent killer’ because it blocks arteries with no outward symptoms. Companies, too, have silent killers working below the surface – mutually reinforcing barriers that block strategy implementation and organizational learning.”
- Core barrier = “poor vertical communication.”
- Source: Michael Beer and Russell Eisenstat, “The silent killers of strategy implementation and learning,” *Sloan Management Review* (summer 2000).

The change *process* matters

- “If there is one clear result from the research on change management, it is that employee participation increases individual ownership and excitement and, in turn, decreases individual resistance to change. The more people are involved, the more the change effort is their change effort.”

Source: M. Tushman, and C.A. O'Reilly III. *Winning Through Innovation : a Practical Guide to Leading Organizational Change and Renewal*. Harvard Business School Press, 1997. p. 200.

A learning strategy for creating healthier organizations

Thought ↔ Action

- Process models the goals
- Vision driven
- Values based
- Strategic focus
- Top-down & bottom-up
- Empowerment & engagement
- Not a 'program'!

Avoid over-planning



Putting talk into action

Guiding principles

1. Identify and leverage an organization's strengths
2. Find opportunities in existing initiatives and language
3. Build people goals into unit/department business plans
4. Nurture a culture of excellent communication and collaboration
5. Involve staff
6. Create alliances with other change agents

Leading change...

What is your vision of a healthy organization?



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