

How healthy organizations support learning and innovation

Graham S. Lowe

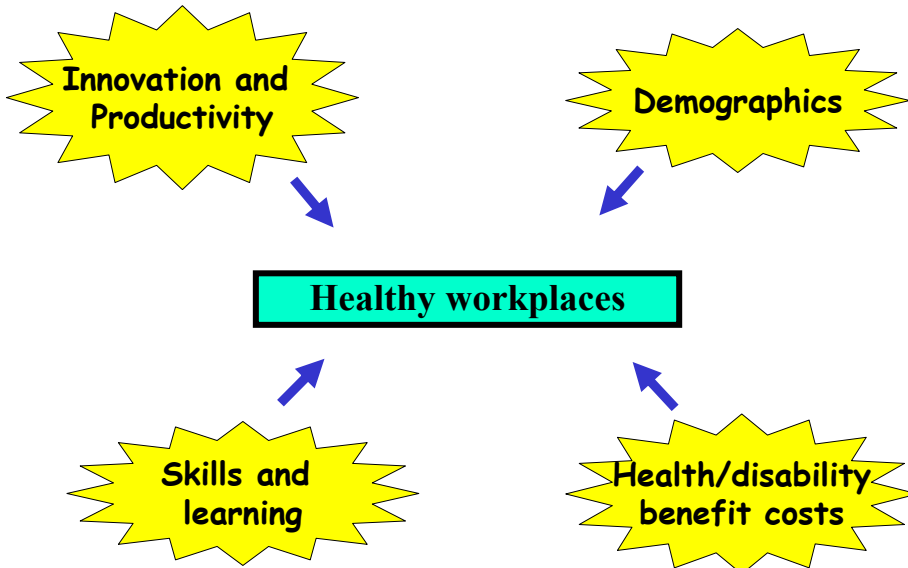
Keynote presentation at The Changing Face of Work and Learning conference, Edmonton, 25 September 2003.



Copyright © 2003 Graham Lowe Group

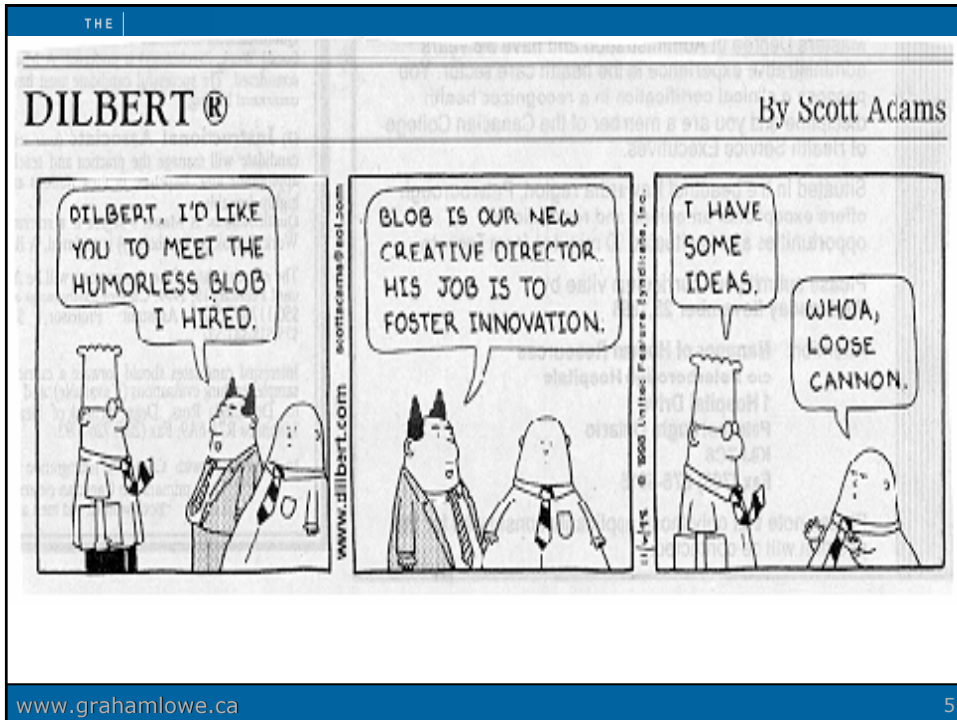


Health risks to innovation



Knowledge and innovation

- The federal government's innovation strategy claims that "(k)nowledge is the main source of competitive advantage, and it is people who embody, create, develop and apply it." *Achieving Excellence: Investing in People, Knowledge and Opportunity. Canada's Innovation Strategy.* Industry Canada 2002 [www.innovationstrategy.gc.ca]
- **BIG question:** what kind of work environment enables employees to acquire and use knowledge?



5

THE
GRAHAM LOWE
GROUP

Rising work pressures

Work intensification:

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

Consequences for:

- employee health
- health care costs
- work-life balance
- absenteeism, turnover
- morale
- learning and skills

What ever happened to the 'leisure society'?

www.grahamlowe.ca

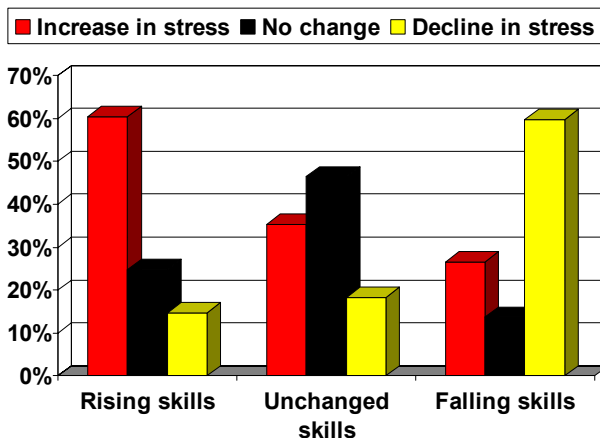
6

Stress and the 'Creative Class'

- Focus on the key economic role of knowledge workers (managers, professionals, technicians)
- Richard Florida calls these workers 'the creative class' (*The Creative Class*, 2002)
- The creative class feels more rushed, time-impooverished and stressed than other groups
 - perceive their time as increasingly valuable
 - have flexible schedules
 - ICT enables them to take their work everywhere

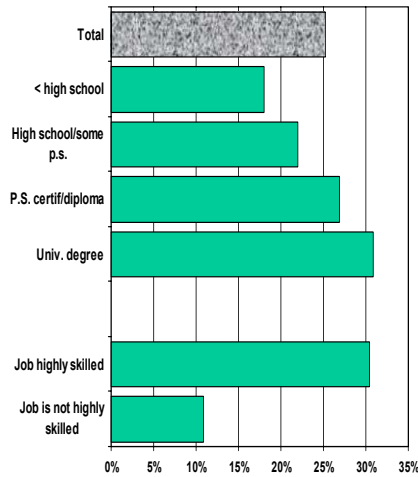
Stresses of a knowledge economy

Change in stress at work over previous 5 years, Britain, 2001



Data from 2001 Skills Survey, representative sample of 4470 paid workers between ages of 20 and 60.
Source: F. Green and D. Gallie, "High skills And high anxiety: skills, hard work and mental well-being."
SKOPE research paper No. 27, University of Warwick, Spring 2002.

Job stress by education and skills, Canada



Percent of workers strongly agreeing that their job is very stressful

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

- *Peter Drucker:* knowledge workers must be treated as assets, not costs. Their work must enable continuous innovation, learning and teaching
- *Problem:* knowledge work occurs in organizational contexts that can undermine these goals

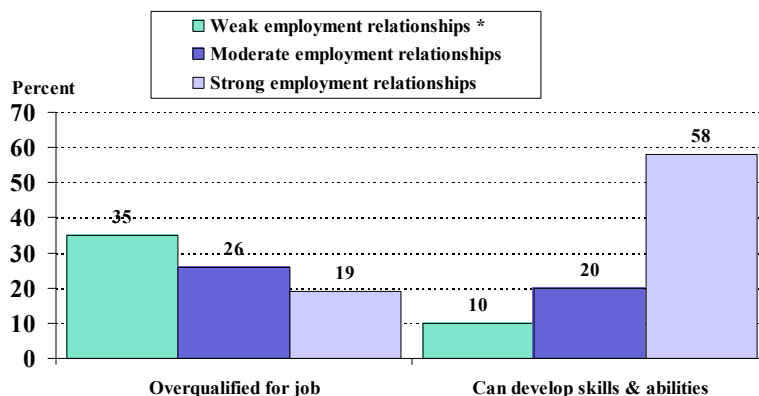
Supportive work environments

What's in a good job?

- Four dimensions of employment relationships define a 'good job':
 1. trust
 2. commitment
 3. communication
 4. influence
- Strengthened by a healthy and supportive work environment
- Weakened by downsizing, restructuring

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

Employment relationships and skills

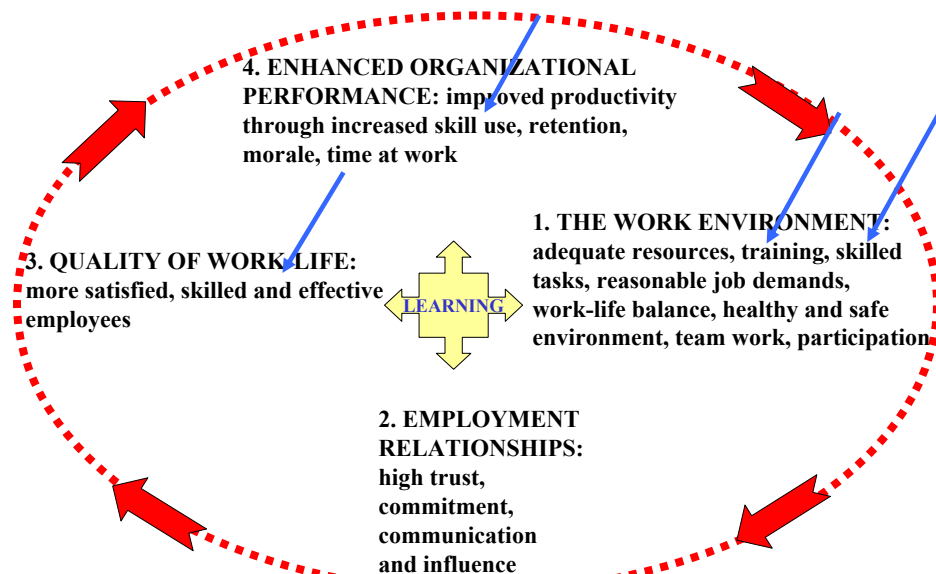


Trust, commitment and learning

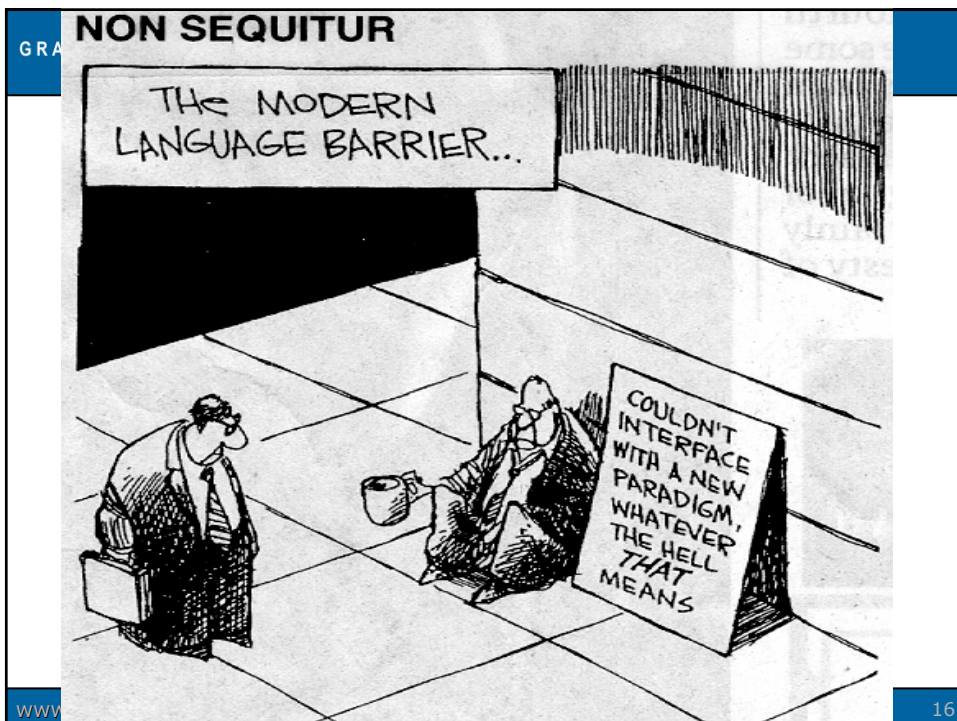
- A recent review of workplace learning focuses on High Performance Work Systems
 - high mutual trust and high commitment
 - generate productivity gains by making better use of all workers' intelligence, practical skills and creativity
 - engage all employees in seeking ways of improving their performance
- "Employees have to feel secure enough to experiment and try new behaviours and learn from mistakes."

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

A virtuous circle



The healthy organization



The Healthy Organization

- Goes beyond workplace health promotion, linking health and performance
- Population health logic
- Addresses individual health risk factors *and* workplace contexts
- Balances customer expectations, organizational goals, employee skills and health needs

See: U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. *The Changing Organization of Work and the Safety and Health of Working People*. 2002. www.cdc.gov/niosh

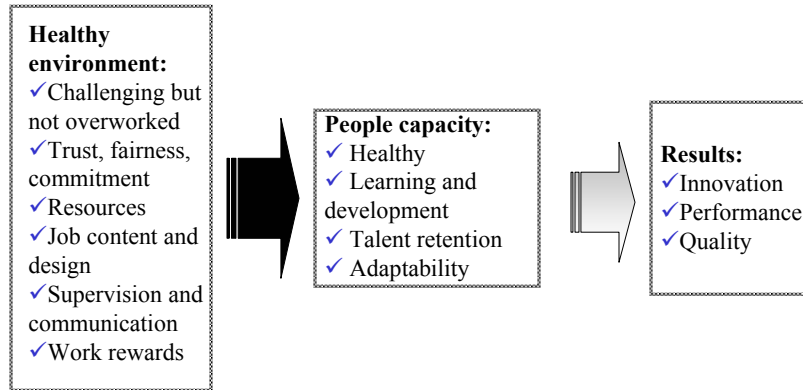
Learning organizations = healthy workplaces

- Lots of pressure to make better use of existing talent
- Need to create enabling conditions for the use and development of skills
 - *a healthy and supportive work environment*
- The human resource management practices and organizational contexts that support learning also define a healthy workplace
- All workers can be 'knowledge workers' if given continuous learning opportunities

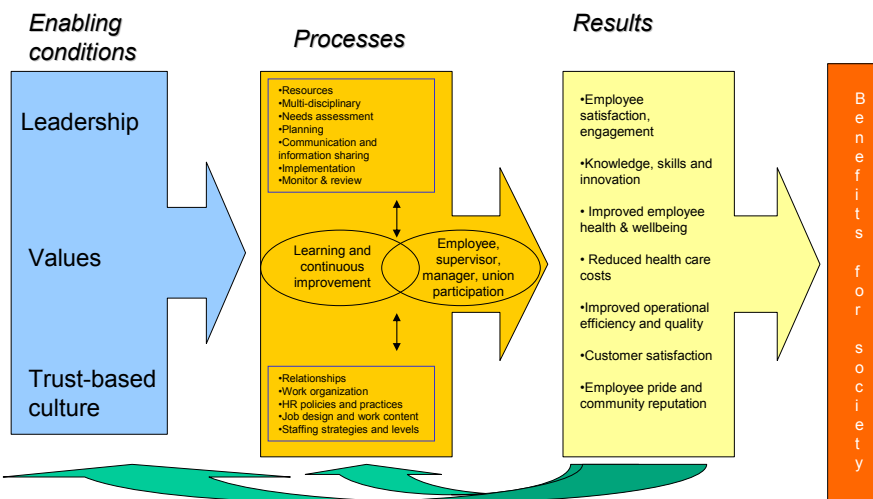
Statistics Canada reports that being too busy at work is the most common reason cited by those facing barriers to job-related training in 1997 (by 42%). *Perspectives on Labour and Income* (Summer 2002).

The logic of a healthy organization

Here's how a healthy work environment, people capacity, and organizational effectiveness are linked:



Learning model for creating healthy organizations



Two strategies for healthier organizations

Program strategy

- **thought** → **plan** → **action**
- Tends to get bogged down in the planning stage
- Imitation driven
- Narrow project focus
- Top-down change with some formal group participation
- Expert-led
- Limited diffusion

Learning strategy

- **thought** ↔ **action**
- Results in greater health improvements
- Vision driven
- Strategic business focus
- Top-down / bottom-up change process
- Empowerment
- Wide diffusion

Adapted from E. Menckel and L. Österblom, *Managing Workplace Health* (Swedish National Institute for Working Life, 2002) p. 57.

Knowing vs. doing



What governments must do

- Federal and provincial governments can no longer afford to treat health, employment, and economic issues as separate policy spheres
- The workplace is off bounds for most public policy, so governments must find ways to encourage employers to take a leadership role in creating healthy organizations

Health and corporate social responsibility

- The European Union wants “health at work” to be part of a corporate social responsibility framework
 - firms adopt voluntary “good practices” that exceed legislated requirements
 - integrate health at work into a European employment strategy
 - link promotion of quality employment with full use of human productive potential

See: *Adapting to change in work and society: a new Community Strategy on health and safety at work 2002-6*. Commission of European Communities, March 2002.

Getting on 'The List'

- National and regional awards, 'lists', and standards can promote public policy goals
- Examples:
 - UK's *Investors in People*
www.iipuk.co.uk
 - European Union's *Best in Europe*
www.eu100best.org



A vision of higher quality work

- ✓ Security
- ✓ Trust
- ✓ Voice
- ✓ Openness
- ✓ Healthy
- ✓ Balance
- ✓ Initiative
- ✓ Learning

The result is
fulfilling,
sustainable
and productive
work

Source: G. Lowe, *The Quality of Work: A People-Centred Agenda* (Oxford University Press, 2000).