

**“WHAT PUBLIC POLICES FOR CITIZENSHIP AT WORK?”**

**INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM  
Citizenship At Work? Thinking The Workplace Of The Future**

**June 23, 2004  
Laval University, Quebec**

**Brigid Hayes  
Interim Director, Labour  
Canadian Labour and Business Centre**

The Canadian Labour and Business Centre was established in 1984 and has evolved as a centre for business-labour dialogue and consensus building. Effective public policy in labour market and skills issues requires broadly based stakeholder engagement. Our board includes labour and business representatives, and is co-chaired by Perrin Beatty of the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters and Ken Georgetti of the Canadian Labour Congress. The CLBC enjoys active Board participation from federal, provincial, and territorial governments, and from universities and community colleges. This combination has enabled the CLBC to build a unique Canadian forum.

Throughout our history, we have been recognized for our balanced and inclusive approach. Whether exploring human resource issues in different sectors of the economy, analyzing new workplace arrangements, or surveying private and public sector leaders about their policy priorities and practices, the Centre engages all parties constructively.

The Canadian Labour and Business Centre is pleased to be a partner at this Colloquium. Our business and labour board of directors consistently supports our efforts to examine the world of work from a practical and workplace centred point of view.

I will be drawing upon our research in Canadian workplaces to take a brief look at some of the issues that are priorities for creating the successful workplace of the future.

My key starting point is the fact that the future workplace will likely operate in an environment in which it faces continuing difficulties finding and retaining key skills. Many workers will have reached retirement age (especially in the public service) and left the work force. The capacity to address the resulting skills issues will help define the success of the workplace.

“Successful workplaces” will have explored strategies that include:

- Workplace health, work/life balance.
- Diversity.
- Worker retention and knowledge management strategies.
- Continuous learning strategies.
- Understanding the importance of essential as well as technical skills.
- Innovative phased-in retirement arrangements.

*Workplace health, work/life balance.* The successful workplace will pay attention to the health and wellness of its workers, with a view to achieving the potential competitive recruitment/retention advantage in a time of continuing skills shortage. It will understand the toll on worker health exacted by workplaces in which workers have little influence over how they do their job, or in which they are tasked with high expectations yet lack the authority to marshal the resources needed to deliver.

There are some major divides between management and labour on the current state of workplace health. CLBC’s survey of labour and business leaders found that while 45% of managers said that workplace health had improved over the last two years, only 17% of labour leaders held that view. Conversely, 54% of labour leaders felt that workplace health had deteriorated compared to

only 18% of business leaders who held this view. And what has changed? – productivity has improved, while work/family pressures, stress levels, worker morale, and absenteeism have all worsened.

To try to understand this issue better, CLBC looked at a series of individual workplaces in detail and a number of key themes emerged.

1. Senior leadership involvement is crucial. Without exception, the successful workplaces were characterized by a strong leadership presence and explicit support for workplace health initiatives. Leadership must ‘get it’.
2. Workplace size is important. In general, larger sized organizations were more likely to have initiatives in place. We’ve not yet figured out how to reach small and medium sized enterprises.
3. Finally, we found an increasing focus on workplace health used as a strategic tool to create a workplace of choice and assist in worker retention.

*Diversity.* Immigration contributes almost all net labour force growth in Canada. In fact, immigration will contribute all of Canada’s net labour force growth by 2011. Immigrants come to this country with high levels of education. 94% of male immigrants in the skilled worker category have post secondary education, and their dependents have high rates as well (68% for women and 54% for men). This compares to 43% of Canadian-born men and women having post-secondary education. Recognizing this, successful workplaces will explicitly establish processes that recognize the credentials of foreign-trained workers to enable them to work at the level of their expertise.

Such workplaces will also ensure that all workers have sufficient language and literacy skills. Diversity brings a richness to the workplace and requires management and labour to think in different ways about how to integrate immigrants while taking advantage of the breadth of their experience and knowledge.

Similar efforts to include Aboriginal people can also contribute. The Workplace of the Future will look closely at the Aboriginal population as a source of skilled labour, particularly in western Canada. Aboriginal peoples now tend to live where employment opportunities can be found: about half live in cities, and only a third live on-reserve. The Aboriginal population is much younger than the general population – although the gap is closing – and its educational profile has improved noticeably. Between 1996 and 2001, the proportion of Aboriginal people with a high school diploma increased from 21% to 23%, while the share of those with post-secondary qualifications increased from 33% to 38%.

Unfortunately, significant barriers to employment remain, as gains in educational attainment did not translate into increased employment (contrary to the notion that education is considered a good predictor of income and employment levels). Between 1996 and 2001, there has been no progress in improving the labour market position of Aboriginal peoples relative to the general population. The Workplace of the Future will need to consider this untapped, and increasingly productive, source of new labour.

*Worker retention and knowledge management strategies.* Successful workplaces will take steps to retain their employees and ensure that the knowledge and ‘corporate memory’ of more experience workers is systematically shared with younger employees. While some level of turnover is inevitable, a safe work environment and high productivity levels can be maintained by systematically preserving organizational knowledge.

*Continuous learning strategies.* Successful workplaces will pay ongoing attention to the implications for employees’ skills needs of changes in product and process technology, work organization, etc. In its best form, this will emerge as an ongoing program of learning and skill development that enable s employees to keep their skills current with changing requirements.

It is clear from CLBC’s and others’ research that required skills levels are increasing. In a recent study on the Manufacturing sector, we found that, over the relatively short time span of 1997 to 2003, the proportion of the workforce with a post-secondary certificate, diploma, or degree has increased from 42% to 47%.

*Understanding the importance of essential as well as technical skills.* New forms of work organization, such as teams or increased employee involvement, will place a much higher premium on essential skills such as communications, teamwork, problem solving, as well as basic literacy and numeracy. Workplaces will have to invest more heavily in these skill sets relative to their investments in the ‘harder’ technical skills. Such essential skills also form a sound foundation for further skills acquisition.

*Innovative phased-in retirement arrangements.* Employees of retirement age will likely be healthier than previous generations, and many may not yet be prepared to step into retirement completely. Many may prefer to phase in their retirement by assuming a decreasing workload over several years. This can retain key skills in the workplace for longer as well as ensuring a full knowledge transfer to the next ‘generation’. Finding innovative ways to enable this will also mark a successful workplace of the future. Phased- in retirement is really a catch phrase that can include special assignments, mentoring, job sharing, and end to shift work, reduced hours, and telecommuting. Unfortunately, the tax, pension, and paperwork implications of these accommodations present barriers that can translate into inertia.

In New Brunswick, the nurses’ union brought phased-in retirement to the bargaining table – having spent so many years fighting for improved pensions, unions are cautious about sending mixed signals to employers. As our Viewpoints survey found, however, the strongest support for phased-in retirement does in fact come from public sector unions, (48% citing this option as very important in meeting the skill shortage challenge, Viewpoints 2002).

In order to begin to meet the challenges of the workplace of the future, the CLBC has collaborated with many national sector councils – organizations composed of business and labour that deal with human resources and skills issues. While there has been inconsistency in how each of the 28 councils deal with these issues and with their level of collaboration between business and labour, it is clear that these partnerships signal a new arrangement in the workplace. Often it is on the issues of skills and ensuring that workers can keep their jobs that there is a

point of mutual interest. However, flexibility to meet industry needs is required in order to avoid having sector councils becoming entangled in the daily struggle to survive.

Lately, our work on human resources issues in a number of Canadian sectors has reminded us that trade and other issues in the globalized economy can have a direct and immediate impact on the development of the Canadian workforce. The increasing trans-national mobility of labour, one of the supposedly anticipated results of globalization, requires us to consider that while this process might be good for Canada, but bad for the countries from which our skilled immigrants and their families originate.

Certainly, in the case of our physicians' project where we are looking at workforce demographics, we have already heard serious concerns that industrialized nations may be increasingly making up their skills shortages by effectively depriving developing nations of crucial skills. How many South African physicians are we welcoming into the country? What is the developmental impact of that out-migration on South Africa's health care needs? Do our immigration policies, and our apparent appetite for internationally trained workers, take into account considerations about whether these practices are sustainable? Are they ethical?

These considerations have largely focused on the negative and conflictual impacts of our relations with other developed and developing nations. However, the CLBC has also been involved in looking at the productive and cooperative side of our relations with other countries.

Since 1998, the CLBC has been involved in a CIDA-sponsored partnership with the Secretariat of Employment and Labour Relations of the State of São Paulo, Brazil. The partnership is designed to share Canadian labour market, workplace, and training expertise with our Brazilian partners so that they may adapt them to their most pressing needs. Over the next three years, our partnership with the Brazilians will see transfer of the knowledge of Canadian business and labour leaders, policy makers, researchers and educators, in such areas as co-operativism, micro-credit, e-government, PLAR, and labour market forecasting. These will assist in the creation of public employment policies and programs in the state of São Paulo that will address the needs of the most excluded segments of the Brazilian population.

We see our own collaborative efforts in part as a recognition that working to create the best possible Canadian workplaces need not be a zero-sum game over ensuring that fundamental developmental goals related to the world of work in the developing world are met.

The trends are clear. Employers are going to take more action to attract and retain workers. Evidence strongly points to growing importance of life-long learning. Workers are increasingly aware of the need to upgrade their skills to stay in the best jobs and keep careers on track. Immigration and the integration of Aboriginal People in the labour force are going to be a much higher profile issues. The way ahead requires working collaboratively and in innovative ways that ensure workers have the skills and support they need to lead productive lives and participate fully as citizens.