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Workplace Change in Canada: Union Perceptions of Impacts, Responses and Support Systems

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IRC PRESS

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Executive Summary

Workplaces in Canada have experienced a wide variety of changes over the past two decades. There is growing evidence that they are becoming increasingly lean, insecure, stressful, unsafe and highly controlled. While there has been considerable analysis of workplace change and its effect on workers and firm performance, much less is known about the impact on unions. This paper presents highlights of the results of a major survey of unions on their perceptions of the impact of change initiatives and their responses to these initiatives.

- The overwhelming majority of unions surveyed indicated that they had been faced with workplace change/work reorganization initiatives. These initiatives frequently involved negotiations with management.

- Downsizing/restructuring was the most common change initiative faced by the unions surveyed. Programs involving contingent compensation were the least common change initiatives.

- Change initiatives were primarily initiated by management. While the majority of unions did not resist the changes, they did not provide unreserved support either. Canadian unions did show a pro-active orientation towards change.

- Unilateral implementation of workplace change initiatives by management was the dominant pattern, especially in situations where union bargaining power had weakened or union-management conflicts had increased. Implementation following consultation with the union was frequent and recurrent.

- The survey respondents indicated that workplace change has led to a decline in worker confidence in management, a reduction in the job security of their members, and deterioration in the quality of work life.

- A majority of unions surveyed responded that workplace change initiatives significantly strained union resources, heightened the need for expanded rank and file communication, and generally created an atmosphere of crisis.

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- The union response to workplace change has been pro-active, in that a majority of the respondent unions have developed policies on specific change initiatives and have instituted programs to analyze potential threats and opportunities, educate and train local leadership and membership, and provide technical help in negotiations.

- Over one-third of the unions surveyed have developed a comprehensive workplace change policy agenda to guide their local leadership and membership, one indication of the desire of trade unionists to exert strategic control over the change process.

- The survey indicated that pro-active union initiatives are mainly confined to large unions with a diverse membership.

Introduction

Workplaces in Canada, and elsewhere in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, have experienced a wide variety of changes over the past two decades.[1] Pressures for change are numerous and varied. They include:

- management's quest for cost efficiency and flexibility to respond more effectively to changes in the economy, labour markets and public policy;
- the increasing emphasis on product and service quality;
- growing workforce diversity with varying worker needs and aspirations; and
- the popularity of a new system of human resource management, oriented towards 'high performance organization' and inspired by the ideology of lean production.

While downsizing has been the most visible manifestation of change,[2] management attempts to rationalize work processes and structures have also led to increased emphasis on flexible work rules and scheduling, job consolidation, multi-skilling/multi-tasking, employee involvement in decision-making through 'self-managed' teams and problem-solving groups, greater information sharing, expanded training opportunities and 'cooperative' labour-management relationships to foster a 'participatory organizational culture.' Although the nature, scope and pattern of change have been diverse, there is growing evidence that 'once a protected habitat offering a measure of prosperity in exchange for a lifetime of dedicated work,' workplaces of today are becoming increasingly lean, insecure, stressful, unsafe and highly controlled.

The management obsession with efficiency and flexibility, and the climate of uncertainty and insecurity associated with workplace change pose both threats and new opportunities for unions.[3] The successive waves of downsizing in both large private sector corporations and the public sector, the increased emphasis on outsourcing/contracting-out, and the expanding use of temporary and part-time work are eroding the organizational and bargaining strength of the unions. Similarly, growing employer demands for concessions in wages, benefits and work rules are straining the ability of unions to effectively represent their members in defending and advancing worker rights and promoting social justice, equity and fairness in employment. On the other hand, union involvement in change initiatives has the potential to expand their independent role and functions in the workplace and to gain influence at the strategic levels of business decision-making. Thus, regulating the pace and nature of workplace change has emerged as one of the greatest challenges facing unions. The phrase 'unions live and die in the workplace' is no longer a cliché. Unions' survival, and their prospects for renewal, are now closely linked to whether they are reactive or pro-active in their strategies.

Regulating the pace and nature of workplace change has emerged as one of the greatest challenges facing unions.

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1 There is now a massive literature on workplace change. For a summary of Canadian literature see Kumar (1995a), Statistics Canada (1998), Betcherman et al. (1994) and feature articles and collective bargaining updates in **Collective Bargaining Review** (1995-97) and **Workplace Gazette** (1998). The U.S. literature is summarized in Cappelli et al. (1997) and Appelbaum and Batt (1994). The workplace change and its impacts in OECD countries are highlighted in Locke, Kochan and Piore (1995) and Human Resources Development Canada (1997).

2 See Conference Board of Canada (1997, 196-7) and Statistics Canada (1998). Downsizing has been particularly pronounced in the public sector and in large firms. See Clark (1997), and Kumar, Murray and Schetagne (1998).

3 See Kumar (1995b, 1995c), Smith (1995), Nissem (1997), Juravich (1998), Richardson (1998), and Lazes and Savage (1996).

While there has been considerable analysis of the nature and scope of workplace change, and their effects on workers and firm performance, much less is known about how the change has impacted unions, what has been their response, and what kind of strategies, policies, and support systems they have put in place to deal with the change process.[4] One of the purposes of the Survey of Innovations and Change in Labour Organizations in Canada,[5] conducted by the Workplace Information Directorate of Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) in 1997, was to explore the nature and impacts of workplace change and the strategic policy and support systems of unions in Canada to facilitate the change process. The exploration was based on the premise that to effectively regulate the pace and nature of workplace change, unions need to develop a network of policies and support systems to inform, guide and coordinate the activities of their locals—the locus of negotiations in the North American setting.[6] The support systems are considered an essential part of a pro-active union strategy to exert strategic control and coordination over the change process, and a key instrument to drive the union agenda for a positive workplace change that benefits the membership, improves the work environment, and strengthens the union. The survey asked respondents about their perceptions of the incidence, nature, sources, and methods of implementation and impacts of workplace change initiatives over the previous three years. Information was also sought on union policies and such support systems as education, research, communications and technical help for negotiating workplace change.

This paper presents highlights of the survey results on union perceptions and responses to workplace change initiatives. The survey results confirm the widespread incidence of change in both public and private sectors and among small and large unions. The survey also reveals both positive and negative impacts of change on workers and unions, and a diverse pattern of union policies and support systems to deal with change initiatives.

Incidence and Nature of Workplace Change

Workplace change appears pervasive across Canada, according to the survey results. When asked 'over the past three years, has your union been faced with any workplace change/work reorganization initiative?,' nearly 9 out of 10 respondents answered in the affirmative (Chart 1). There was very little variation in union response by sector and membership size. The survey also revealed that change initiatives frequently involved negotiations with management (Chart 2).

The survey results show that downsizing/restructuring was the most common and pervasive workplace change initiative faced by unions (Table 1). Programs involving contingent compensation, such as profit sharing, knowledge-based pay and employee stock ownership, were the least common change initiatives, reported by a little over one-quarter of the unions surveyed, mostly private sector unions. Indeed, except for downsizing and

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4 See Kumar (1995c), Murray et al. (forthcoming), Lévesque et al. (1997), Frost (1997), Bourque and Rioux (1997), Wright (1995, 142-95), Lapointe and Paquet (1994), *Collective Bargaining Review* and *Workplace Gazette*. Also see Walton, Cutcher-Gershenfeld and McKersie (1994) for a theory of negotiated change.

5 See Kumar, Murray and Schetagne (1998) for the survey sample, methodology and survey response. In brief, the survey was completed by 99 of the 269 labour organizations in Part I of the *Directory of Labour Organizations in Canada*. These 99 labour organizations represented 2,344 million members, roughly 59.9 percent of union members in the sample population. An overview of the survey results is available from the Workplace Information Directorate of HRDC.

6 See Szapiro (1996).

Chart 1
Incidence of Workplace Change Initiatives (n=90)

'Over the past three years has your union been faced with any workplace initiative (s)?'
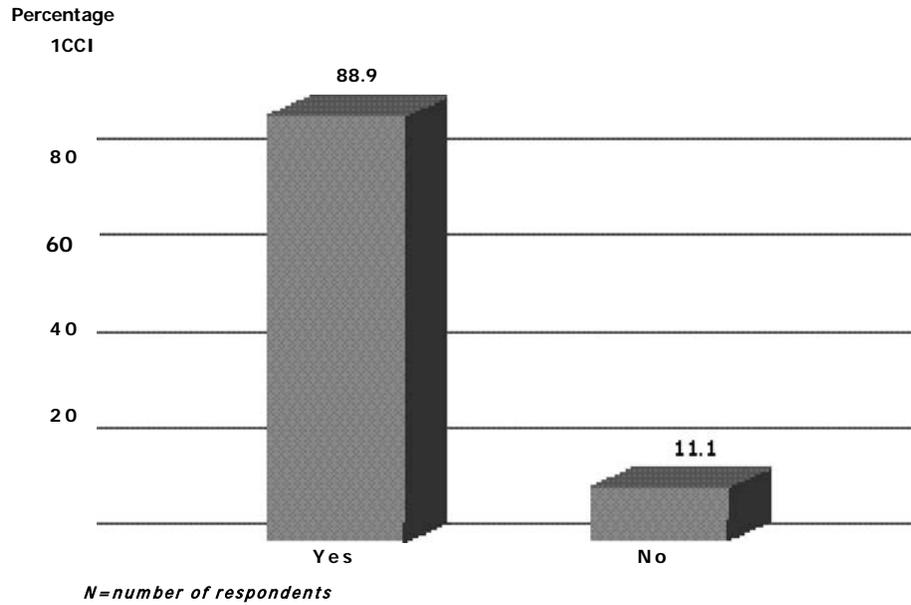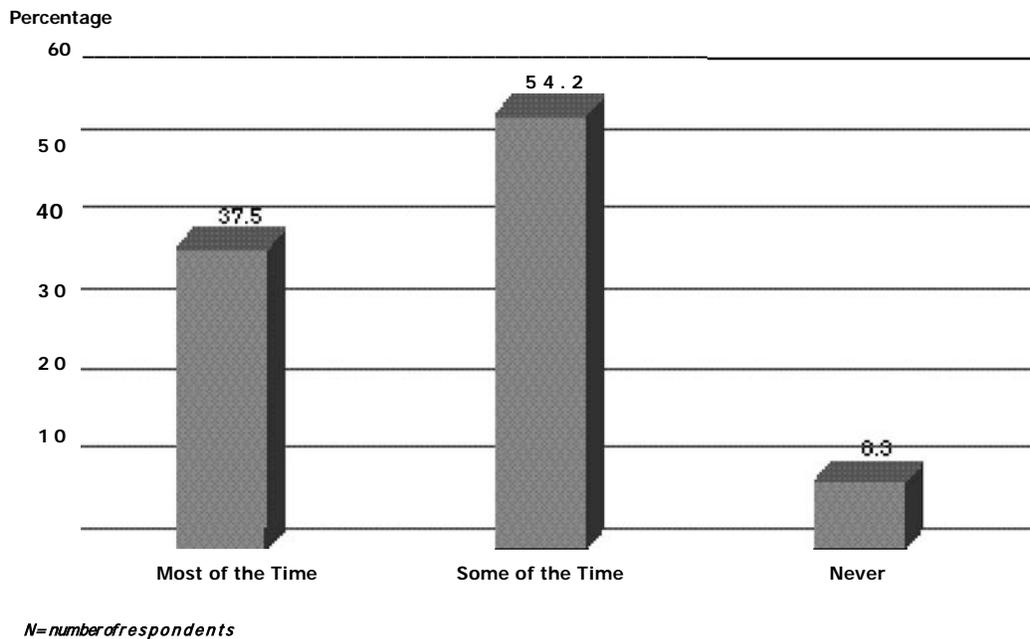
Percentage

N=number of respondents

Chart 2

Frequency of Negotiations over Workplace change (n=72)

Did workplace initiatives involve negotiations with management?

Percentage

N=number of respondents

restructuring which was common across all unions, private sector unions were more likely than public sector unions to report initiatives involving technological change, team or group work, and outsourcing and contracting out. The initiatives were generally inter-related and were associated with increased downsizing and management emphasis on cost reduction. These survey results suggest that workplace restructuring in Canada more typically concerns strategies to restructure jobs and reduce staffing in order to integrate new technologies and reduce costs. In other words, there is very limited evidence of the currency of purported 'best practice' or 'high performance' models of human resource management entailing enhanced employee participation and/or gainsharing.[7]

Table 1
Nature of the Change Initiatives

		Most of the Time (°/U)	Some of the Time (°/U)	Never (°/U)
Restructuring/downsizing	(n=82)	50.0	41.5	8.5
Changes in job classification/job tasks	(n=84)	29.8	53.6	16.7
Introduction of new technology	(n=82)	23.2	53.7	23.2
Outsourcing/contracting out	(n=79)	17.7	49.4	32.9
Introduction of a continuous improvement/TQM/ISO standards	(n=80)	16.3	40.0	43.8
Introduction of team/group work	(n=81)	16.0	53.1	30.9
Changes in work scheduling	(n=82)	14.6	65.9	19.5
Profit sharing/knowledge-based pay/employee stock ownership	(n=79)	3.8	24.1	72.2

n=number of respondents

We also asked respondents who initiated the change and whether their local leadership and National Office supported the initiatives (Table 2). Almost all the unions stated that they were primarily management initiatives. Again, there was little variation in union response to the question by either sector or size. A majority of unions also indicated that sometimes the change was also initiated by the union either independently or jointly with management.

The survey results show that unions did not resist the change initiatives (Table 2). However, they did not provide unreserved support either. The lack of support was more frequent in public sector unions and in small union organizations with less than 1,000 members. The virtual absence of resistance to workplace change is indicative of Canadian unions' pro-active orientation towards change and their desire to get involved in the change process to protect and advance worker interests more effectively. As we pointed out in an earlier paper (Kumar, Murray and Schetagne 1998), promoting worker participation in decision-making is an important organizational priority of unions in Canada.

The survey queried unions on how workplace change initiatives were implemented (Table 3). The respondents stated that while unilateral implementation by management was a dominant pattern, implementation following consultation with the union was frequent. Unilateral implementation was less common in the public sector than in the private sector, partly reflecting the high rates of unionization among public sector workers.

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7 On this point, see also Betcherman et al. (1994, 53) who estimate that 70 percent of firms might be classified as engaging in traditional HRM practices, 18 percent focus on more participative models and 12 percent on the extrinsic aspects of compensation policy. See also Statistics Canada (1998).

Table 2
Source of the Initiatives

		Most of the Time (°/U)	Some of the Time (°/U)	Never (°/U)
They were primarily management initiatives	(n=83)	75.9	21.7	2.4
They were joint union-management initiatives	(n=82)	6.1	67.1	26.8
They were union initiatives	(n=83)	10.8	51.8	37.3
Local leadership supported them actively	(n=74)	17.6	66.2	16.2
National office supported them actively	(n=66)	22.7	60.6	16.7

n=number of respondents

Table 3
Methods of Implementation of Change

		Most of the Time (°/U)	Some of the Time (°/U)	Never (°/U)
Unilaterally implemented by management	(n=82)	39.0	47.6	13.4
Implemented by management after consultation with the union	(n=88)	26.1	67.0	6.8
Implemented through modification of the existing collective agreement	(n=83)	18.1	48.2	33.7
Implemented following negotiations outside the existing collective agreement	(n=85)	22.4	62.4	15.3

n=number of respondents

The survey also showed that unilateral implementation by management was more likely in situations where union bargaining power was reported to have weakened over the three years preceding the survey. Unilateral implementation was also associated with moderate to significant increases in union-management conflicts.

Figures in Table 3 suggest that union-management consultation over workplace change implementation was also recurrent. The survey results also show that workplace change initiatives are more likely to be implemented following negotiations outside the collective agreement than through modifications of the existing collective agreement. However, a majority of respondents (58.2 percent) indicated that when initiatives were implemented following negotiations outside the collective agreement they were subsequently incorporated into the collective agreement.

Impacts of Workplace Change

The survey asked unions to evaluate the impact of workplace change on workers, work environment, and the unions themselves. The responses reveal a mixed pattern of both positive and negative effects with some variations by sector and union size.

While unilateral implementation by management was a dominant pattern, implementation following consultation with the union was frequent.

A majority of respondents stated that workplace change has led to a decline in worker confidence in management, a reduction in the job security of their members, and deterioration in the quality of work life of workers (Table 4). The responses confirm the findings of other studies (Statistics Canada 1994; Lewchuk and Robertson 1996 and 1997; Lewchuk 1997; Lévesque et al. 1996) and results of the HRDC survey on the effects of the changing union environment on workers and the work environment (Kumar, Murray and Schetagne 1998).

Table 4
Impacts of Workplace Change on Workers and the Work Environment

		Increase (°/U)	No Change (°/U)	Decrease (°/U)
Worker confidence in management	(n=82)	4.9	24.4	70.7
Quality of work life of workers	(n=82)	14.6	20.7	64.6
The job security of members	(n=80)	15.0	28.8	56.3
Union influence in the workplace	(n=81)	42.0	30.9	27.2
Worker confidence in the union	(n=81)	33.3	43.2	23.5
Worker influence on the job	(n=81)	33.3	38.3	28.4
Union-management cooperation	(n=82)	34.1	36.6	29.3

n=number of respondents

The survey responses further indicated that the decline in worker confidence in management and job security was more pronounced in the public sector compared with the private sector. Similarly, a much higher proportion (76.8 percent) of smaller unions, with a membership of less than 10,000 workers, reported a decline in worker confidence in management than the larger unions (57.7 percent). On the positive side, between one-third and two-fifths of the unions surveyed stated that worker confidence in the union, worker influence on the job, union influence in the workplace, and union-management cooperation had increased as a result of workplace change. There was very little variation in union responses by sector and size on most of these indicators. The only exception was the increase in worker influence on the job which was cited by a much higher proportion (47.1 percent) of private sector union respondents than those in the public sector unions (23.4 percent). While workplace change often entails quite contradictory implications for many unions and workers in all sectors, there appear to be greater opportunities to expand worker and union influence in the private sector. In contrast, decreased worker confidence in management and decreased job security are the dominant traits of workplace change in the public sector.

Impacts of workplace change on unions have been similarly diverse, judging by the survey results (Table 5). A majority of unions surveyed indicated that workplace change initiatives have significantly strained union resources, heightened the need for expanded rank and file communication, led to a modest or significant increase in rank and file activism, reinforced the need for more education and research, diverted attention from organizing and other day-to-day union activities, created an atmosphere of crisis, created significant or modest pressures within their union to formulate an independent agenda on workplace change, been a modest to significant source of tension between members and local leadership, and adversely affected solidarity between bargaining units. A few unions also cited change initiatives as a modest to significant source of tension between their locals and the National Office. The survey responses highlight the complex effects of workplace change on union organizations. Given the prevalence of workplace change and

the often adverse effects of this change on workers, there are considerable new pressures coming to bear on both national and local levels of union leadership. This suggests a growing awareness among unions of the need to assess their functions and activities to serve their members more effectively. In particular, what emerges from these union responses is an increasing onus on the importance of pro-active strategies in relation to workplace change.

Table 5
Effects of Workplace Change Initiatives on Unions

Workplace change initiatives have:		Significant (°/U)	Modest (°/U)	None (°/U)
Emphasized the need for expanded rank and file communication	(n=89)	57.3	39.3	3.4
Strained union resources	(n=86)	50.0	37.2	12.8
Reinforced the need for education and research	(n=87)	49.4	35.6	14.9
Created an atmosphere of crisis	(n=86)	43.0	39.5	17.4
Diverted attention from organizing & other day-to-day union activities	(n=85)	41.2	44.7	14.1
Created pressures to formulate an independent union agenda	(n=86)	31.4	45.3	23.3
Led to greater rank and file activism	(n=89)	24.7	65.2	10.1
Been a source of tension between members and local leadership	(n=87)	12.6	50.6	36.8
Been a source of tension between locals and National Office	(n=77)	10.4	28.6	61.0
Decreased solidarity between units	(n=85)	9.4	43.5	47.1

n=number of respondents

Union Response: Policies and Support Systems

When faced with workplace change initiatives by management, unions might plausibly simply accept or reject management proposals. The unreserved acceptance of such initiatives, without a proper analysis of costs and benefits, is fraught with risk for a local union. Not only are such initiatives, as we have seen, likely to produce adverse outcomes for members, but they might also erode both the unions' independent role in the workplace and the workers' confidence in their union. A simple rejection of such initiatives, however, is also very risky. It may raise the ire of the rank and file since workers are frequently lured into believing that workplace change can ensure future employment security and contribute to more challenging and satisfying jobs and a better work environment. An ideological stance of opposition and non-involvement may also generate feelings of anger and helplessness in local leadership and rank and file since the union is not able to provide the membership the help they desperately need to sort out useful and beneficial changes from changes that are harmful in the short or longer run. In other words, simple acceptance and simple rejection of workplace initiatives, whatever their often difficult consequences, are increasingly unpalatable options. That is undoubtedly why many unions are getting actively involved in the change process by developing their own agenda on workplace change, identifying the elements of change that will benefit membership and

strengthen the union, and seeking to implant a support system to guide and coordinate the change process taking place at the local level. Indeed, there is increasing evidence that both a pro-active stance and the availability of technical and ideological support are key dimensions of the local union's ability to play a strategic role in workplace change.[8]

Judging by the survey response, unions in Canada are responding pro-actively to the change process. A majority have developed policies on specific change initiatives, and instituted programs to analyze potential threats and opportunities, educate and train local leadership and membership and provide technical help in negotiations. A little over one-third of the unions have also developed a comprehensive policy and independent agenda on workplace change.

Table 6 shows that a majority of unions have formulated specific policies to ensure access to training and retraining opportunities and restrict or control contracting out and outsourcing. Nearly one-third to one-half of the unions surveyed have also established policies on employee involvement, flexible work/compressed week/job sharing, team concept or group work and labour adjustment. One-quarter of the unions have similarly developed responses to the popular Total Quality Management (TQM) initiatives. However, very few unions have policies on such initiatives as telework, employee share ownership/group incentives and knowledge-based pay.

Table 6
Unions Policies on Specific Workplace Change Initiatives

Does your union have specific policies on:		Yes (%)	No (%)
Training/retraining	(n=73)	63.0	37.0
Contracting out/outsourcing	(n=73)	56.2	43.8
Employee involvement	(n=72)	47.2	52.8
Flexible work/compressed week/job sharing	(n=71)	40.8	59.2
Team concept/group work	(n=70)	35.7	64.3
Labour adjustment	(n=68)	35.3	64.7
Total quality management	(n=70)	25.7	74.3
Contracting in	(n=69)	23.2	76.8
Telework	(n=67)	13.4	86.6
Employee share ownership/ group incentives	(n=69)	13.0	87.0
Knowledge-based pay	(n=66)	12.1	87.9

n=number of respondents

Table 7 presents the incidence of the array of support systems developed by unions to facilitate their effective involvement in the change process. Figures in Table 7 show that the majority of unions surveyed conduct education programs or courses to train local leadership and rank and file membership on workplace change issues (in some cases partially funded by employers), report that their National Office provides technical help to locals in negotiating workplace change, and conduct membership surveys to solicit member's views on problems, potential benefits, and impacts of workplace change on workers and their work environment which are communicated back to members to raise awareness of threats and opportunities associated with workplace change. One-third of the unions have even designated staff resources exclusively for dealing with workplace change issues.

8 See, for example, Lévesque and Murray (1998), Frost (1997), Murray et al. (forthcoming).

Table 7
Union Support Systems on Workplace Change

		Yes (%)	No (%)
Does your union conduct education programs/ courses on workplace change issues to train local leadership and rank and file membership?	(n=90)	71.1	28.9
If yes. Are these programs fully funded by employers?	(n=47)	2.1	97.9
If yes. Are these programs partially funded by employers?	(n=55)	38.2	61.8
In addition to education and training, does the National Office provide other technical help to locals in negotiating workplace change?	(n=77)	74.0	26.0
Has your union conducted membership survey(s) to solicit the members' views on problems, potential, impacts of workplace change on workers and their work environment?	(n=86)	67.4	32.6
If yes. Are the results of the survey(s) communicated back to members?	(n=59)	89.8	10.2
Has the union designated staff resources exclusively for workplace change?	(n=86)	34.9	65.1

n=number of respondents

Perhaps the most telling evidence of the pro-active union stance on workplace change is the survey finding that over one-third of the unions surveyed have developed a comprehensive workplace change policy agenda to guide their local leadership and membership (Table 8). These 34 unions, of the 99 who responded to the survey, represent nearly 1.8 million workers, almost one-half of the union members in Canada and three-fourths of the total membership of the unions surveyed. Included among them are both private (19) and public (15) sector unions as well as small and larger unions. Based on the survey results, it appears that private sector unions and those with large and diverse membership are more likely to have developed a comprehensive workplace change policy agenda than those in the public sector and smaller unions. The survey results indicate that development of a comprehensive workplace change agenda is a recent phenomenon; an overwhelming majority came about in the past five years. The survey also reveals that in over two-fifths of the unions, the policy agenda were adopted at the union convention, reflecting both the democratic traditions within unions and an attempt to ensure a wide dissemination of this policy. A majority of policy agenda include detailed guidelines for locals to help them negotiate workplace change that benefits the membership and strengthens the union. However, only 38.5 percent of the unions that have a comprehensive policy agenda suggested that their locals were obliged to follow the guidelines. In the vast majority of the unions, locals remain autonomous and independent in their ability to negotiate workplace change.

The survey asked unions to identify the key elements of their workplace agenda. The survey responses reveal a number of common elements, cited by a majority of unions that have developed a comprehensive policy agenda on workplace change (see Table 9). There was no significant variation in elements of union agenda by sector except for improved health and safety which was cited as a key element by a much higher proportion of private sector unions. The elements of a comprehensive workplace change agenda, however, differed significantly by size of unions. Large unions with membership of 10,000 and over were more

Private sector unions and those with large and diverse membership are more likely to have developed a comprehensive work place change policy agenda.

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Table 8
Incidence of Comprehensive Union Workplace Change Policy Agenda

		Yes (%)	No (%)
Has your union developed a comprehensive workplace change policy to guide local leadership and membership?	(n= 88)	38.6	61.4
Was this policy adopted at the union convention?	(n=34)	61.8	38.2
Does the policy include detailed guidelines for locals?	(n= 34)	53.1	46.9
Are locals obliged to follow these guidelines?	(n=34)	38.5	61.5

n--number of respondents

Table 9
Key Components of Unions' Workplace Change Policies (n=34)

Does your policy statement include the following?	Yes (%)
Expanded training and retraining opportunities	76.5
Employment security guarantees	70.6
Union involvement in strategic decision-making	67.6
Mechanisms for consultation and participation	64.7
Statement on the nature of relationship with employers	64.7
Requirement for negotiated change through normal collective bargaining channels	58.8
Need for work environment improvements	58.8
Union role in job redesign	58.8
Improved health and safety	50.0
Information sharing on business matters	44.1
Position on contingent compensation	38.2
Role and functions of group work (e.g., team concept)	38.2
Position on the use of consultants	35.3
Sharing of gains from increased productivity and quality	23.5

n--number of respondents

The elements of a comprehensive work place change agenda differed significantly by size of unions.

likely than smaller unions to include in their agenda a statement on the nature of their relationship with employers, and the need for improvement in the work environment, guarantees on employment security, mechanisms for consultation and participation and information sharing on business matters. Similarly, large unions were more likely to make reference to the role and functions of group or team work in their agenda than the small unions.

The survey also showed that unions with such comprehensive workplace change policy agenda, especially the larger unions, were more likely to have expanded support systems to guide and coordinate the activities of their locals. More specifically, a much higher proportion of unions with a comprehensive policy agenda conducted education and training programs on workplace change, provided technical assistance in negotiations, and had both formal mechanisms for rank and file communication and staff resources exclusively designated to deal with workplace change initiatives. It would appear that the more extensive resources associated with larger unions are an important factor in the development of more sophisticated and comprehensive workplace policy agenda.

Conclusions

The results of the HRDC survey of innovation and change in Canadian unions highlighted in this paper suggest that workplace change has had a significant impact on workers and their unions. The unions, rather than resisting change, have clearly preferred to get involved in the change process with a pro-active strategy that includes policies and programs to guide and coordinate the activities of their locals in negotiating positive changes that benefit their members and strengthen the union. The emergence of a comprehensive policy agenda on workplace change and expanded programs of education and training, rank and file communication and technical assistance are indicative of trade unionists' desire to exert strategic control over the change process to ensure a safe, healthy, productive work environment with opportunities for training and retraining and an effective involvement in the management decision-making process.

However, the survey results show that pro-active union initiatives are limited, mainly confined to large unions with a diverse membership. The challenge facing unions, therefore, is to assure a wide diffusion of these pro-active policies and support systems and to place regulation and control of the workplace change process as an item of high priority at the bargaining table. A high priority on negotiating change is perhaps the most effective way to ensure consensus-based change and positive outcomes for workers. Unfortunately, despite the pro-active union stance, change in most workplaces continues to be implemented unilaterally by management without prior consultation with the union. Resource constraints and a concessionary bargaining environment are the major barriers limiting unions' ability to implement their workplace agenda effectively. Unions need to devise ways and means to expand their resources on workplace change support systems, and study the feasibility of shared programs and activities in such areas as education and training to achieve economies of scale in the utilization of their resources. Unions may also have to explore new methods of bargaining,[9] in particular the obligation to engage in continuous bargaining (possibly in the context of longer contracts) and/or shorter contracts that allow ongoing discussion with management of change. Finally, to ensure that workers have a voice in the tremendous changes currently affecting their working environment and that positive social outcomes ensue from these workplace changes, serious consideration must be given to public policy changes that make consultation and participation in the workplace change process mandatory.

Change in most workplaces continues to be implemented unilaterally by management without prior consultation with the union.

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