

INTRODUCTION: ASSESSING THE PROSPECTS FOR THE HIGH PERFORMANCE WORKPLACE¹

Anthony Giles, Gregor Murray and Jacques Bélanger

Over the past decade or so a widespread consensus has taken root around the proposition that work systems are being fundamentally transformed, an idea often encapsulated in the expression 'high performance workplace'. This consensus is remarkably broad, stretching as it does from the university classroom to the corporate boardroom, from the seat of government to offices, stores and factory floors, from the pages of magazines and newspapers to the outer reaches of the Internet. Virtually everyone is agreed that deep-seated changes are reshaping the way production and work are organized, the way employees and employers deal with each other, and the way governments seek to shape the workplace and the labour market.

There is, of course, a wide range of explanations of these changes, running from the thesis that we are caught in a maelstrom of technological innovations that are propelling us willy-nilly into new ways of organizing the way society produces, all the way to the conspiracy-tinged thesis that a global elite (central bankers and their ilk) are orchestrating a revival of nineteenth-century methods of squeezing out more work for less. There is also a deep cleavage between those who celebrate the productive potential and 'empowerment' of workers in the emerging high performance work systems, confidently predicting that we are on the threshold of another of capitalism's golden ages, and those who decry the changes, painting an alarming scenario of a world divided into an elite of 'knowledge workers' and an underclass of dispossessed, disenchanting and potentially troublesome unemployed, underemployed and unemployable. To round out the cast of characters, let us not forget the sceptics who, although hopelessly outgunned in the war of words that characterizes the academic and public debates

around the changing workplace, perform the invaluable role of reminding us that, when all is said and done, most of us are still either managers or managed, bosses or employees, and that we should not allow the rhetoric of innovation and change to obscure the fundamental continuities with the recent (and not-so-recent) history of employment relations in capitalist societies. To mix cultural referents, the times they are a-changin', but *plus ça change, plus c'est pareil*.

Considerable academic effort has been devoted to describing the patterns of diffusion of workplace change, explaining the decline of previous models of organizing production and seeking to characterize the new high performance models. The gist of all this research might be summarized as follows: there is fairly wide agreement that what are known as 'Fordist' models of production are crumbling, that new models are emerging, but that this process has only just begun, is unfolding slowly and unevenly and is still open-ended. However, just below the surface calm of this general consensus lies a stratum of turbulence: although most observers are agreed that production systems and the work they put in motion are changing in fundamental ways, there is much less agreement about both the extent of change taking place and its consequences for employment relations. Indeed, there are deep cleavages between those who celebrate both the efficiency and the emancipating potential of these new systems and those who bear witness to a workplace increasingly characterized by stress, insecurity and seemingly arbitrary responses to contingency.

A detailed examination of the state of thinking on the new workplace is all the more important because, while a torrent of words has been spoken and written about the new 'high performance' workplace, the research into these changes has not entirely kept pace. The purpose of this book, then, is to advance our understanding of the consequences and challenges of the new high performance production model. To this end, we have brought together a group of leading researchers to take stock of the evidence and implications of the new workplace. Specially commissioned for this project, we asked each group to assess a particular facet of the so-called new workplace, to indicate what they see to be the state of knowledge about their particular question, to highlight what they view as important, and to explore the implications for both research and practice. Drawing on examples from a variety of national contexts, they seek to characterize the nature of current workplace change and assess the implications of these changes for the organization of work, the workers who do the work, employment relations and public policy. The thesis underlying the volume as a whole is that fundamental changes are taking place, sufficient to justify the notion of a new production model, but that

they are frequently uneven and profoundly contradictory in character. Hence, the new work systems are typically very fragile, characterized by significant tensions because of their impact on workers and the contradictory exigencies that they imply for employment relations.

The result is a strongly interwoven series of contributions offering a critical look at the transformations observed in many workplaces in the advanced, industrialized economies. In particular, we seek to address three sets of concerns that we believe command the attention of both practitioners and researchers. First, what is the shape of the new production model (or models)? There is certainly a need to develop a fuller understanding of the different permutations of the new production systems that are displacing Fordism and their implications for the nature of work. Second, what are the consequences and implications of new production models for work and work relations? In particular, is teamwork one of the defining characteristics of the new workplace? What is the actual impact of the new ways of organizing production on workers? A third set of concerns relates to the institutional implications of the new workplace. As suggested by Boyer and Hollingsworth, 'for a new social system of production to occur, there must be a new configuration of institutions concerning industrial relations, training systems, state interventions, and financial intermediation, as well as a complementary international regime' (Boyer and Hollingsworth, 1997, p. 193). Here there are two areas where academic research and practical reflection need to be brought into closer contact: the impact of the new models of production on the institutions of labour-management relations and on the role of government. All of these questions are critical to an understanding of the conditions that foster or impede the emergence of new models of production. Indeed, it is only by tracing the consequences within the productive organization, through to the institutional framework and then to the sphere of public policy, that we will be able to develop a full understanding of what new models of production portend.

In tackling these issues, the approaches followed in the various chapters that make up this volume are characterized by three common features worth noting. First, this book seeks to bring the insights of the tradition of industrial relations research to bear on our understanding of the changing workplace. This tradition is one that places a special emphasis on the importance of blending conceptual development with detailed empirical analysis, a characteristic that is reflected in all of the chapters. But, second, the industrial relations tradition is also distinctive in the attention that it pays to bridging the gap between the interests of researchers and the concerns of practitioners and policy makers. Our hope is that the traffic across this bridge

will not all flow in one direction, but that the transfer will be two-way, that the practitioners, artisans and students of workplace change can measure the utility of the ideas advanced in this book in terms of their own experiences of change and bring that experience to bear on our broader understanding of the future shape of the workplace. Third, all of the contributions are international in outlook, permitting the authors to go beyond a literature too narrowly focused on the normative requirements of 'high performance' work organizations. Yet all of the chapters are driven by a common agenda designed to understand the nature of changes taking place in a way that it is hopefully accessible for students and a broader audience.

The remainder of this introduction briefly presents the major themes in this book. Our purpose is neither to conduct an exhaustive review of the scientific literature nor to advocate particular models or practices; instead, our intention is to try to highlight the importance of each of these issues, their connection with the broader themes of the book and with each other, and to highlight some questions that run through the chapters.

New Models of Production

Progress needs to be made in identifying the types of new models that are taking shape. This will involve an effort to go beyond the fascination with whatever management fad is currently being touted, whether 'total quality management', 'cellular manufacturing', 'reengineering', or whatever. Technological and organizational innovations may assume a variety of forms and there is considerable debate over their various permutations, both theoretical and observed, as well as their relative merits. To cite but a few of the distinctions, Boyer and Hollingsworth (1997, p. 194) distinguish a number of alternatives to mass standardized production: customized production, which 'assumes a certain reduction in volume'; diversified quality mass production, which purportedly 'combines the benefits derived from product differentiation with significant quantities of production'; adaptive or reactive production, which 'builds upon the constant redefinition of market niches and the fastest possible use of new technologies'. Another alternative, flexible specialization might be described as 'the manufacture of a wide and changing array of customized products using flexible, general-purpose machinery and skilled, adaptable workers' (Hirst and Zeitlin, 1997, p. 221). Each of these, and they represent only a few of the possibilities already identified in the literature, imply certain configurations as regards different dimensions of the production process, be it in terms of production

cycles, customer relations or networks of suppliers and subcontractors. The precise choices involved in the organization of production have significant implications for the overall characterization of the new model.

The principal objective of Chapter 1 is to look closely at the different permutations of the core principles that define the new models. In that chapter, Jacques Bélanger, Anthony Giles and Gregor Murray examine the evidence for the emergence of a new production model. After setting out the rationale for looking at production models and the broad characteristics of the Fordist production model, they argue that we can now discern the emergence of a new production model. That model can be summed up by three sets of interrelated principles: productive flexibility and the standardization of processes in the sphere of production management; greater application of skills and knowledge, increased 'multi-skilling' and more self-regulation in the sphere of work organization; and the transfer of risk and insecurity to the workforce and increased social adhesion or employee commitment to organizational goals and the ways of achieving them in the sphere of employment relations. These are the principles that cut across the variegated terrain of most workplace change currently taking place. They can be combined in quite different permutations – greater flexibility at the cost of increased standardization, greater self-regulation to the detriment of standardization, less social adhesion (or employee commitment) in favour of increased insecurity, to name but a few. Not only are these principles difficult to achieve in practice but they often result in important tensions and even significant contradictions, so much so that the new model exhibits a high degree of instability. Yet, however difficult to reconcile, these principles are at the heart of efforts to transcend 'Fordist' production arrangements – be it in the goods sector, in private services or, increasingly, in public services – because the prize of unleashed productive potential in a context of increasing competition appears to be so great.

Bélanger, Giles and Murray go on to explore the sources of this instability in order to assess the future prospects of the new production model. Apart from the natural process of trial and error, they point to two significant sources of variation and instability. The first concerns the internal tensions and contradictions between the core principles of the new model. The second is related to the lack of an appropriate institutional framework, both at the level of the firm and in society more generally, that could improve the internal coherence and stability of the emerging model of production.

This first chapter then gives an overview of the dynamics of this new production model and, in so doing, sets out the major themes for the entire book. It will be of particular interest for readers seeking to build bridges

between the different contributions to this book, especially between the first chapters, which focus primarily on different facets of the new model, and the latter chapters concerned with the institutional framework.

Employee Involvement in Work and the Workplace

Given the widespread agreement that a key factor in the crisis of Fordism is the lack of worker autonomy, it is less than surprising that nearly every analyst of workplace change identifies increased employee involvement or participation as a central feature of emerging models. There is, moreover, widespread empirical evidence of an increased incidence of various forms of employee involvement in the workplace, ranging from quality circles to problem-solving groups to autonomous work teams. There is also an enormous normative literature inciting managers to encourage employee involvement in order to harness the gains in flexibility and efficiency required by the new production systems (see, for example, Walton, 1985). This has given rise to a new participative lexicography of team members, associates, facilitators, and the like. However, once we move beyond the general observation of increased participation, there is much less consensus as regards the significance and efficacy of these forms of employee participation.

A first question concerns the nature of these different types of participative mechanisms. Here we might look at the extent of participation, which ranges from little more than the introduction of suggestion boxes or the opportunity to participate in quality circles to, at the other end of the continuum, the devolution of substantial autonomy to workers or work groups, allowing them much greater scope to define and regulate their jobs. Another consideration in distinguishing between the different types is the level of employee involvement. Participation is typically limited to a narrow focus on certain issues of operational concern to one's job at the point of production. However, it is possible, albeit much less frequently observed, to conceive of more substantial employee involvement in questions which concern the actual design and operation of productive organizations.

A second question concerns the permanence of different forms of participation since it is now well established in the literature that many such experiences start with considerable initial enthusiasm but, whether because of flaws in conception or contradictory pressures resulting from the pursuit of other objectives, finish in disappointed expectations and a reversion to traditional patterns of work organization. A related question therefore must be the consideration of the conditions associated with the introduction of

various forms of employee involvement. This involves questions about the process through which certain types of participation are introduced but also, to adopt the vernacular, the particular organizational 'fits' or the way that certain practices must be 'bundled' together.

One of the core principles at the heart of recent experiences in work reorganization is greater autonomy and self-regulation and there is growing evidence of its complex and contradictory effects in the context of the reorganization of production designed to achieve maximal results on vectors of both flexibility and efficiency. A frequent example, particularly in assembly-line production such as that of the automobile industry, is greater worker discretion over work process at the cost of a loss of control over the pace of work or in the context of a considerable work intensification sparked by general insecurity. It is clear that almost everywhere the innovation process is rooted in a frantic drive for greater organizational efficiency and flexibility, whether through quality, customer satisfaction or good old-fashioned cost reduction. However, it can be argued that the fundamental dynamics of the relationship between workers and employers are manifestly not being altered in a significant way. Indeed, the inescapable tensions that arise from a relationship that is imbued with hierarchical power relations is the very rationale for innovation in work organization. In other words, there is more than a little justified scepticism as regards the overblown rhetoric on employee 'empowerment' and organizational liberation, a virtual 'new Jerusalem' of the supposed changes in the relationship between workers and managers in an era of work innovations. By the same token, and as has often been observed, there is little likelihood of mass worker mobilization in favour of a return to the Fordist organization of production. Traditional methods of production are the source of considerable employee alienation and there is certainly evidence of a positive worker response to the principles of both wider scope and self-regulation. Thus the new forms of employee involvement merit close scrutiny as regards their complex effects, their interrelations with other aspects of the reorganization of production and employee relations, and their transformative potential.

The second chapter, by Paul Edwards, John Geary and Keith Sisson, focuses on the significance and efficacy of new forms of employee participation that appear to characterize many of the new forms of work organization. Drawing on both the international literature and a major European survey in which they played a leading role, Edwards, Geary and Sisson attempt to distinguish fact from fiction as regards the degree of diffusion of different types of employee participation and the conditions associated with their establishment. The results of this ten-country survey

confirm that the employers' interest in 'task participation' has increased in recent years. However, the diffusion and intensity of change are more limited than is often suggested in the international literature. They actually report that the 'team work which has dominated so much of the debate is very much the exception rather than the rule'.

Edwards, Geary and Sisson further assess the possibilities and limits of these new forms of direct participation, with a particular emphasis on what they identify as the predominant form of employee involvement: 'task participation'. They situate this trend in a broader theoretical approach that sees a perpetual, dynamic tension between autonomy and control in the work process. In their view, inasmuch as teamwork is increasingly associated with superior performance in the workplace, it is likely to remain on the agenda for the foreseeable future. However, they are much more circumspect as to whether it will come to define an entire period of development of work organization.

The Impact of New Forms of Work Organization on Workers

Given the important role allotted to the principle of self-regulation in work organization and the principle of social adhesion in employee relations, the impact of new production systems on workers is clearly a critical issue. Yet research focusing principally on the concerns of employees is dismayingly rare. Instead, the focus of much of the research carried out to date on the recent wave of workplace change has been centred squarely on the concerns of management: the practices to implement; the fostering of change; the impact on productivity, quality and profitability. According to this management agenda, workers are viewed either as obstacles to change or as passive recipients of change. In either case, training is the buzzword inasmuch as workers will require, at a minimum, new social skills and, when they are perceived as obstacles to change, an appropriate dosage of motivational techniques. Thus, although there have been tremendous efforts to comprehend the 'performance effects' of innovative work practices on organizations, much less work has been done on workers' concerns (see, for example, Ichniowski *et al.*, 1996).

The research that does focus on workers tends to be considerably more caustic about the possibilities and potential of the reform of work organization. In particular, it draws attention to the many problems encountered in the implementation of these new work systems: deteriorating working conditions in many circumstances; a narrowing of autonomy,

especially under lean production; an increase in stress, pace and work effort with the many attendant health and safety consequences; reduced job security in many cases, which obliges workers to accept these changes; a sense of decreased membership support for their unions and a decline in labour's capacity to act as a countervailing force to management. And yet, while there is considerable empirical support for this more insidious characterization, at least in some circumstances, there is also support for a more positive set of outcomes. In particular, certain kinds of work reorganization, such as some forms of teamwork, are more likely to garner the support of workers than others. Just as was argued above in relation to employee involvement, the impact of such practices is all the more important because of the increasing evidence of their complex, contradictory and often varied effects.

These themes are featured in the third chapter, in which Eileen Appelbaum considers the implications of new forms of production for workers themselves. Appelbaum surveys the evidence of the impact of work reorganization on a number of key dimensions of working conditions and the quality of work life, including workload, the intensity of work, job stress, job satisfaction and health and safety in order to identify the tensions underlying some of the new models of work organization as well as the avenues most likely to lead to workers' acceptance of these models. Her broad assessment of actual studies of the effects of workplace changes that characterize the high performance workplace on workers is that they are much more positive than negative.

Workplace Innovation and the Institutional Framework of Labour-Management Relations

Are traditional institutions incompatible with new production models and forms of work organization? And if, as many believe, there is a mismatch, then what should be done? This latter question, it must be stressed, can be posed from two different perspectives: on the one hand, for those who wish to promote innovation, the incompatibility is seen as an obstacle to innovation; on the other hand, for those who defend the traditional institutions, it is seen as a problem of maintaining mechanisms that protect workers from arbitrary managerial power.

The traditional system of industrial relations would appear to be under challenge in terms of the structure, content and the process of collective bargaining (see, for example, Katz and Darbishire, 2000). In terms of the structure of bargaining, there is a continuing trend towards decentralization

with, in particular, the redefinition of points of comparison and an unambiguous effort to structure negotiations in line with the notion of business units or profit centres, regardless of its relation to the traditional establishment. Thus there are stresses and strains between pressures to calibrate negotiations solely in terms of local conditions, as opposed to the kinds of comparative considerations of relative equity and union solidarity that have characterized pattern and multi-establishment bargaining. As regards the content of collective agreements, the search for greater flexibility suggests much more fluid forms of contract codification: in essence, definitions which allow maximum scope for flexibility. In terms of process, there has been considerable promotion of new forms of 'jointness' which favour more co-operative, problem-solving arrangements. Betcherman and Chaykowski note that in Canada, there is some limited 'evidence of firms and unions that have developed new approaches to collective bargaining and the conduct of labour relations that reduce traditional "adversarialism" and that facilitate solutions yielding a greater level of mutual gain' (Betcherman and Chaykowski, 1996, p. 27). On this latter point, particularly in the United States, there has been a considerable effort to promote this 'new' labour relations as an alternative both to traditional forms of bargaining but also to what many industrial relations scholars see as the real alternative of non-unionism. This is the basis of a strategic conundrum for unions: risk promoting the decline of the union as an institution if the union does not collaborate in some of the new forms of workplace regulation; yet risk declining support from their members if the abandonment of many of the collective defence mechanisms, associated with the traditional institutional model, translates into increased work intensity and declining employment security. In other words, in this new context, unions risk being 'damned if they do and damned if they don't!'

The pressures on the traditional framework of labour-management relations and the genuine uncertainty about its possible replacements make it clear that much remains to be clarified as regards the precise character of the institutional framework of labour-management relations in the context of this new production model. The fourth chapter, by Paul R. Bélanger, Paul-André Lapointe and Benoit Lévesque, explores the implications of the new production models for the study of the modernization of social relations at the level of the firm. They seek to draw lessons from the available evidence on organizational innovation and the institutions of work regulation. In particular, they make a broader argument for a kind of systemic paralysis or institutional blockage in the evolution of the new model of work or the high performance workplace. The new model of production is predicated on

social partnership between unions and management at the level of the firm. Bélanger, Lapointe and Lévesque argue, however, that the ability to achieve such partnership appears exceedingly fragile and is often temporary. They locate the source of this fragility in the broader social context, notably the absence of institutional support for innovation and partnership. In other words, the reasons for the uneven and partial diffusion of the new production model is to be found as much at the societal level as at the level of the firm. In order to illustrate their case, they draw on research conducted in the Canadian province of Quebec. For many observers, Quebec presents many of the features of a best case scenario for achieving the new kinds of social compromises that must underlie the new production model. These include a high level of unionization, a union movement favourable to workplace innovation, a significant role for public or social capital in the modernization of firms, and a tradition of tripartite consultation between employers, unions and the state. Yet the Quebec experience of labour-management partnerships around workplace innovation remains very uneven. For Bélanger, Lapointe and Lévesque, the spread of this new model consistently founders on the absence of changes in the macro-social institutions that are needed to support local innovation in the organization of work.

The Role of the State in the Diffusion of Workplace Innovation

What role does the state play in the development and diffusion of new models of production and work organization? What role should it play? These two questions, the one empirical the other normative, are of considerable importance to the understanding and practice of workplace innovation. Yet they are questions that have been rarely broached and still more rarely addressed in any substance. This is not to say that government policy has been overlooked in the debate, for the literature is fairly littered with suggestions for specific reforms. But there have been few attempts to consider the question in depth.

This is perhaps not surprising in an era in which the state has fallen out of intellectual fashion. There seems little doubt that governments and state officials across the advanced industrial world, if not in all of its four corners, are exceedingly anxious to see new production models develop more quickly and new forms of work organization take firmer root. After all, it is clear (or so common knowledge says) that the competitiveness of the nation (upon which rests the revenues, domestic acquiescence and international standing

which are the lifeblood of the state apparatus) depends on the ability of the national economy to develop and mobilize its human resources. The problem, in short, is not a lack of interest or concern. In fact, the problem is a dual one of new constraints and persistent institutions.

The new constraints are easily summarized. First, under the twin pressures of the new fiscal orthodoxy of deficit reduction and tax regime competition, the resources available to the state have, or have been made to appear as if they have, diminished radically. Second, the ideological ascendancy of neo-liberalism has put deregulation and privatization at the top of the political agenda. Third, globalization of markets and production has instilled a fear of falling out of step with one's competitors and falling behind in the global race for investment and markets, thereby making it dangerous to propose policies that might be seen as too radical. Finally, the weight of existing public institutions and practices is such that they are often difficult to modify, inasmuch as they are, in essence, the continuing manifestation of a certain compromise between social forces within a society.

What then should public policy on workplace innovation be in an age of globalization? Can public policy be used to shape the contours of new forms of work organization? The answers to these questions are the subject of some considerable debate. The neo-liberal response is, of course, to leave workplace innovation in the hands of managers and, should they deem it to be appropriate, in the hands of their workers. The concern of a number of American scholars is that such an approach tends to promote the proverbial 'low road' to workplace change as opposed to the 'high road'. As observed by Locke:

Value-added-based strategies are expected to lead to the most fundamental transformations in employment relations and have the best chance of producing outcomes of mutual benefit to firms and their employees. Cost-based strategies, on the other hand, are expected to lead to a downward spiral of wages, working conditions, and labor standards and to reinforce adversarial relations at the workplace. (Locke, 1995, p. 23)

Ray Marshall (1992) has been a leading exponent of the activist view of the role of public policy in the promotion and adoption of 'high performance systems'. Such an approach is, of course, predicated on a view that high performance, value-added strategies also lead to a set of desirable macro-economic results and public policy should therefore seek to promote the adoption of such practices. While initially emphasizing the importance of managerial values in the choice of industrial relations strategies, Kochan *et al.*

(1986; 1991) have increasingly pointed to the role of public policies in the dissemination of workplace change, notably because of the way that public policy promotes acceptable sets of behaviour and influences managerial actions. Similarly, Locke suggests that the institutional framework plays an important role in the types of strategies pursued: 'The low-cost response to market pressures and changes appears to be most frequent in countries with weak institutions, low levels of unionization, decentralized bargaining structures, and a limited government role in labor market affairs' (Locke, 1995, p. 24).

Thus, increasing attention is being focused on the possible role of public policies in the diffusion of workplace change, but what kinds of public policies? Here there is much less consensus. Beyond the level of the firm, there are various suggestions to promote different kinds of sectoral and/or national consultation. Indeed, this has been the focus of some experimentation in Canada in terms of both sectoral bodies to deal with training and new consultative mechanisms such as the Canadian Labour and Business Centre, formerly known as the Canadian Labour Market and Productivity Centre. Some also point to the existence of national institutions, in countries such as Japan and Australia, to study and promote workplace innovation (Locke, 1995). There is also the possibility of a legislative obligation to promote workplace consultation on change, a theme which appears to be increasingly important in a number of European Community directives. This latter approach has the additional merit of crossing national boundaries which, in principle at least, decreases the possibility of transnational whipsawing. For others, forms of workplace and company consultation presume that the union or an equivalent representative body is a viable actor in the workplace, a considerable presumption in a number of national contexts, that can safeguard workers from some of the more contradictory effects of the new model. In this respect, the process of workplace innovation is ultimately tied to the collective power of actors in the workplace. It can, therefore, be argued that the reinforcement of employee access to collective representation is a necessary prerequisite for the development of proactive union policies on workplace innovation. Indeed, the whole issue of labour movement strength is critical to an understanding of why institutions are strong in some national contexts and their levels of unionization high.

The fifth chapter, by Richard P. Chaykowski and Morley Gunderson, considers the role of the state and the challenges for public policy in the evolution of the new model of production. Drawing on their analysis of North American public policy, they highlight an increasing paradox between the growing need for labour policy initiatives to support innovation and

adjustment in the organization of work and the increasing difficulty of sustaining a national consensus on such public policy initiatives. Chaykowski and Gunderson undertake a broad review of the current state of research on this question in order to set out the principal choices facing public policy as regards the new production model. In particular, they make an argument for a more strategic and proactive public policy role in the construction of the new workplace.

By now it will be clear that this book does not seek to add yet another tome to the how-to section of business books in your local library. Indeed, if our ambition had been to join the seemingly endless stream of prescriptive prattle about 'empowerment' or 'post-capitalism', we would surely have come up with a catchier title and used more bullet points. Instead, we and the other contributors have sought to bring the traditions of scepticism and critical thinking to bear on recent workplace change. In so doing, we have sought to steer clear of the two extremes that so often characterize treatments of this issue: on the one hand, the tendency of many critics to dismiss the ongoing changes as nothing more than a clever smokescreen intended to disguise intensified exploitation; and, on the other, the naive celebration of the new workplace served up by all too many enthusiasts of the high performance workplace.

But this stance does not mean that we offer a neutral assessment, one that is shorn of any concern for those who are struggling to contend with the changing reality of production, work and employment. Although the contributors to this volume range across the ideological spectrum, all are fundamentally persuaded that the construction of healthier, more democratic and more rewarding jobs must, as a matter of both principle and pragmatism, involve full, genuine and independent participation on the part of the employees who are being asked to embark upon this journey and on the part of the employee organizations and unions that represent them.

Note

1. This Introduction draws on Giles *et al.* (1999).



*Employment and
Work Relations
in Context Series*

WORK EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS IN THE HIGH-PERFORMANCE WORKPLACE

Edited by Gregor Murray,
Jacques Bélanger, Anthony Giles
& Paul-André Lapointe



Series Editors

Tony Elger
Centre for Comparative Labour Studies
Department of Sociology
University of Warwick

Peter Fairbrother
School of Social Sciences
Cardiff University



*Employment and
Work Relations
in Context Series*

WORK AND EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS IN THE HIGH-PERFORMANCE WORKPLACE

The past decade has seen widespread discussion about the transformation of the workplace. There is a general consensus that deep-seated changes are reshaping the way production and work are organized, the way employees, employers and their representatives deal with each other, and the role of governments in this process. There is altogether less consensus about the consequences of such changes for employment relations. Sharp divisions separate those who celebrate the efficiency, knowledge enhancement and emancipating potential of these new production systems and those who bear witness to a workplace increasingly characterized by stress and insecurity.

In this book, a group of leading scholars take stock of the evidence and implications of the high-performance workplace. Drawing on examples from a variety of national contexts, they seek to characterize the nature of current workplace change and assess its implications for the organization of work for workers, managers, employment relations and public policy.

Gregor Murray, Jacques Bélanger, Anthony Giles and Paul-André Lapointe are all Professors in the Industrial Relations Department of Laval University in Quebec City.

 **continuum**
LONDON • NEW YORK
www.continuumbooks.com

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

ISBN 0-8264-4705-8



9 780826 447050 >

**WORK AND EMPLOYMENT
RELATIONS IN THE HIGH
PERFORMANCE WORKPLACE**

**Edited by Gregor Murray, Jacques Bélanger,
Anthony Giles and Paul-André Lapointe**

CONTENTS

<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	vi
<i>List of Tables</i>	x
<i>Preface and Acknowledgements</i>	xi
Introduction: Assessing the Prospects for the High Performance Workplace <i>Anthony Giles, Gregor Murray and Jacques Bélanger</i>	1
1 Towards a New Production Model: Potentialities, Tensions and Contradictions <i>Jacques Bélanger, Anthony Giles and Gregor Murray</i>	15
2 New Forms of Work Organization in the Workplace: Transformative, Exploitative, or Limited and Controlled? <i>Paul Edwards, John Geary and Keith Sisson</i>	72
3 The Impact of New Forms of Work Organization on Workers <i>Eileen Appelbaum</i>	120
4 Workplace Innovation and the Role of Institutions <i>Paul R. Bélanger, Paul-André Lapointe and Benoît Lévesque</i>	150
5 North American Labour Policy under a Transformed Economic and Workplace Environment <i>Richard P. Chaykowski and Morley Gunderson</i>	181
<i>References</i>	213
<i>Index</i>	241

Continuum

The Tower Building, 11 York Road, London SE1 7NX
370 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017-6503

First published 2002

© Gregor Murray, Jacques Bélanger, Anthony Giles, Paul-André Lapointe and the contributors 2002

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0-8264-4705-8 (hardback)

0-8264-4706-6 (paperback)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Work and employment relations in the high performance workplace/edited by Gregor Murray . . . [et al.].

p. cm. — (Employment and work relations in context series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8264-4705-8 — ISBN 0-8264-4706-6 (pbk.)

1. Work. 2. Industrial relations. 3. Industrial sociology. 4. Production (Economic theory) 5. Labor productivity. I. Murray, Gregor II. Employment and work relations in context.

HD4904. W6433 2002

331—dc21

2001042539

Typeset by YHT Ltd, London
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
The Cromwell Press, Trowbridge, Wiltshire