

The Ages of Life, Work-Family Balance and Aspirations in Working Time; Challenges for Firms and Countries

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This paper presents results of a research on working time, working time aspirations and work-family balance over the life course. It is based on the analysis of representative data on the Canadian labour force, excluding the public sector administrations. The data indicate that, no matter the age groups, there is a larger number of Canadians wanting to increase their working hours rather than reduce them. This phenomenon increases compared from 1999 to 2002. Among the group wanting to reduce their hours, it is especially to increase their leisure time, except for the group of 35 – 44-year-old, who would prefer this reduction mainly to better meet their family responsibilities. From 25 to 54 years there is also an important percentage wanting to reduce its hours for family obligations. The economic pressures appeared to slow down social progress on work-life balance issues, since there are not many advances along those lines, but in addition to work-family conflict, the challenge of the aging population might bring working time arrangements to the top of the agenda in coming years.

INTRODUCTION

Over recent years, there has been more and more interest in the reorganization of working time and social times (all times affected at various activities of life), in the context of aging of the population and of increasing difficulties for many to manage professional obligations as well as personal or family responsibilities¹. In the context of an aging population, which will lead to a reduced supply of labour over the coming years, a problem which confronts all nations, but Québec and Canada with somewhat more severity than the US. In the US, many aging workers need to continue working because of low wages and difficulty to retire; however, many might like to go on working shorter hours, as is the case in many other countries (Guillemard, 2007).

In order to solve the problem and maintain our standard of living, a few possibilities are open, but basically, even if productivity may be increased, the essence of the solution lies in an

¹ Among the studies, we mention: Guérin et al. (1994); Fagnani (2000); Fagnani et al. (2001); Families and Work (1998, 1997); Nelson and Quick (1985); Tessier et al. (1992); Pronovost (2005); St-Amour (2005); Tremblay (2005, ed; 2005a,b; 2004a,b; 2003;2002); Vandelac et al. (1999, 1995).

increase of working hours and an increase in activity rates. In this context, we undertook a research on working time in Canada and workers' aspirations in this context.

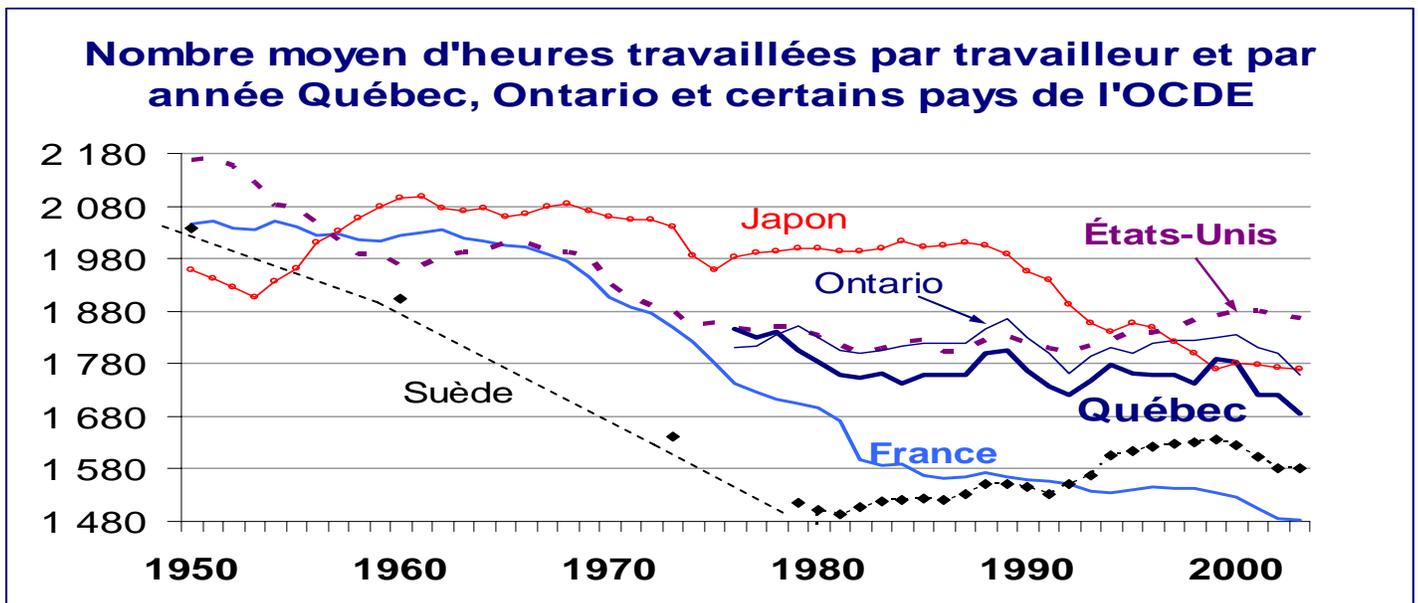
The present article intends to elaborate on this question by analyzing the evolution of employed peoples' work time in Québec and Canada, and by confronting the analysis to empirical data of a very large typical sample of the Canadian labour market on the issues of workers' situation and aspirations as regards working time and working arrangements².

THE PROBLEMS

First, we will set the scene to better understand the challenges at stake in relation with the aging of the population. Québec is the Canadian province which presents the most challenges and will age most quickly, but Canada follows close behind and the Canadian government is also preoccupied with this issue, as are many other countries in Europe and in the Americas. In Québec, the working age group (15-64) will shrink starting around 2008, while the 65 and over will increase their share and the 0-14 will decrease their share substantially. The problem of the aging population is all the more important in Québec in comparison with Ontario and the US since the age group of 55-64 is much less active in Québec in comparison with the US and even with Ontario, as the figure 3 shows. Even if there has been an increase in the activity rate of these groups, it is still well below that of Canada and the US, while the aging of the population is somewhat more accelerated in Québec, because of the fact that it receives less immigration than the two other zones, and that immigrant families generally have more children.

The level of employment in Canada is quite high, and it is true that many European countries have lower activity rates in the 15-30 age group as well as the 55 and over. In the latter case, this is due to the fact that many countries had public pre-retirement schemes in which the State financed workers to retire early. (Guillemard, 2007).

FIGURE 1
AVERAGE NUMBER OF HOURS WORKED BY WORKER AND BY YEAR,
QUÉBEC, ONTARIO AND OECD COUNTRIES



A more detailed explanation concerning the representative character of the sample is supplied further in this article.

Source: Matte, B. presentation at the Political economy association conference, Montreal, Nov. 2007. Quoted in Tremblay (2007, dir).

Finally, figure 1 indicates again that Québec workers work on average more than the French and the Swedish but also highlights the fact that the US work longer hours, while the Japanese and Ontarians work about the same number of annual hours but Québec is somewhat below.

It is in this context that some have put forward the proposition of pushing back the age of retirement, but as the French example of the 2003 Fillon law shows, this does not necessarily have an impact on prolongation of activity (Guillemard, 2007). Indeed, as much research shows (David, 2007), if working conditions and working hours are not satisfactory, it is difficult to keep workers longer. Most analysts now conclude that to increase activity rates of the 55-64 years of age, it is necessary to redesign work and working time. This is why we wanted to address the issue of working time in a lifelong perspective, since it appears that the ternary model (schooling, work, retirement succession) is a thing of the past and that working times should be envisaged in a more flexible way. This brings us to the second problem which needs to be addressed in this context and it is that of the growing difficulty in managing professional lives and personal-family lives as well.

Indeed, there is a growing conflict between work and family and this is due to important changes that have arisen in the family, in the composition of the labour force and in the work organization. In regards to the family, the changes are characterized by a reduction in the number of children per household but, on the other hand, by a higher percentage of women who will have children during their life, by a frequent time prolongation of children remaining or returning to the family residence, as well as the necessity for many households to provide care to aging parents.

As concerns the workforce, the most striking evolution is certainly the massive arrival of women on the labour market. The new workforce counts more women than ever, of all ages and in various periods of their lives, as well as a growing percentage of families where both spouses work. The working population also includes more women with very young children, more single-parent families, and more men and women workers who, because of the aging population and a social deinstitutionalization movement, have to provide care to aging parents in loss of autonomy or to physically or mentally disabled persons. This is a good evolution in terms of increasing the labour force and increasing activity rates of all, but it poses other challenges throughout women's active life, since family and parental responsibilities and tasks generally remain the load of women. (Tremblay, 2004)

The sphere of work is also in full change. The current economic requirements, which are namely characterized by criteria such as "just-in-time" and continuous and intensive production, encourage more than ever the employers to demand always more flexibility: flexibility of the employee's status, costs of workforce, of working time, etc. In practice, this requirement results in a destandardization of jobs and working schedules. What was rare in the 50s and 60s became the rule in numerous workplaces: irregular, unpredictable schedules, evening, night, weekend, during holidays, on call, part-time, at home, in overtime, and so on. These pose challenges for employees assuming family responsibilities and having to plan their schedules while consolidating childcare, school, doctor's, dentist's or other appointments, in other words tending to family needs and obligations and errands, the organization of the everyday life can become very difficult.

As women entered the labour market and as the roles between men and women were redefined, both spheres became communicating vases: the family life suffers the repercussions of the confusion arising in the working world and, conversely, the working world undergoes more and more directly the impacts of elements which destabilize the family. All of this contributes to emphasize the problem of the conflict between the personal life and the professional life, or work-life balance for short.

If the problem cannot be considered as completely new, certain factors contributed to make it more complex during the last decades:

- a) the current changes in the family and, particularly, the increase of the number of working women and single-parent families;
- b) the transformations which occur in the working world, notably flexible hours imposed by the employer, the broken schedules, the schedules other than "9 to 5", etc.;
- c) the delay of adaptation of public services, as well as public policies and the companies' practices offering few work-family balancing measures. (Paquet and Najem, 2005; Tremblay, 2005, dir);
- d) and, finally, the weak participation of many fathers in the parental responsibilities and family tasks (Pronovost, 2005), in spite of a greater interest from their part and a more active participation from some (Tremblay, 2003).

The relation between employment and family is not thus new and its challenges are only more important in the present context of aging populations, since not only will families have to take care of children, but many will also have to take care of aging parents, as was highlighted in table 1. Also, if the number of persons actively engaged in the labour market diminishes, it will of course be difficult to sustain our standard of living, but also universal health and education services to which Canadians are very attached.

The work-life issue is thus not totally new, but what is new is the growing complexity surrounding this relation and its management by families. Wanting too much to simplify the origin of the difficulties would be of course reductionist, but a statistical analysis led with a sample of a thousand respondents had allowed to identify some determining variables, namely the work duration, the persons' age and the number of children. (Tremblay, 2004b). Thus, in order to try to validate these first results while bringing certain light on the contradictions raised in the introduction, we wanted to push the analysis further.

Some research indicate that aging workers change their attitude towards their work (Gosselin, Paquet and Marcoux, 2005) and then seek for better organization of working time at the end of their career. Analyses differentiating according to age will allow us to see to what extent groups that are the most likely to be parents and have difficulties of conciliation (35-44) are more or less favored compared to the aging workers from the point of view of time schedules and organization measures, while seeing how their aspirations can be different. Thus, it is on the basis of reflection on time and ages of life that we organized our empirical research.

The Methodology and the Source of Data

In order to give a documented answer to the questions addressed in the present article, we used the data of the Workplace and Employee Survey (WES) of Statistics Canada which gives the researchers empirical data representative of the Canadian labour market.³ Based on this

³ As mentioned above, this analysis was done with our colleagues Renaud Paquet and Elmustapha Najem. Some results were published in French in Tremblay, Paquet and Najem (2005).

survey, we wanted to know the working hours of the working people, according to their age group, in order to see if the 35 to 44-year-old category identified before as having more difficulties of work-family balance is more affected than the others by the long schedules (habitual hours and overtime). We also wanted to determine if getting older allows benefiting from more measures of organization of working time, which are favourable to conciliation, and finally, we were interested in aspirations according to age as regards to working time and work-family balance .

The data contained in the Workplace and Employee Survey (WES) provides answers to our questions. For the purposes of the present research, we will use, on a merged basis, the data gathered from the employers and the answers supplied by the employees in the course of the survey. Indeed, the WES includes two data banks, the employers' and the employees', containing together several hundreds of indicators. The WES aims at a representative sample of the Canadian labour market, with the exception of the federal, provincial and municipal public services which are excluded. Its data was collected among 6 000 companies and some 23 000 wage earners of these same companies (Statistics Canada, 2004). Data banks are built in order to be able to be merged to acquire all available information on an employee and the firm which employs him. Results introduced in the next section derived from the merger of these two banks.

For the purposes of this research, we used the weighted results which allow a generalization of the data to the Canadian labour market, with the exception, as we have already mentioned, of the public services. The data used is from the 1999 and 2002 surveys. On a longitudinal basis, it is a relatively short period (4 years), but however, it should give some good indications of present trends in the labour market, especially since these four years were marked by an important public debate on the question of working time and work-family balancing. If firms' practices followed the social tendency of ideas and debate, we should notice changes in the course of the analysed period.

The data of 1999 was chosen because it was the first year of the WES. At the time of the analysis, the 2002 data was the last available data; the 2003 and 2004 surveys data should eventually be accessible to us.⁴

The Results of the Analysis

In the light of the questions highlighted above, we shall present in this section the analyses allowing to verify if working schedules vary according to age, and if the categories considered critical from the point of view of work-family balance (35 – 44-year-old) have longer or shorter schedules than others. We shall then analyze the aspirations relating to working time according to the age group as well as the motives that can explain the interest for a reduced working time, including family obligations. Finally, we shall examine the incidence of the flexible working time measures, among which the reduced or compressed workweek, a measure known as favouring a certain work-family balance. Let us now go on to present the results of our analysis.

Working schedules according to the age group

Tables 1 and 2 present the hours usually worked according to the age group in 1999 and 2002. The most important change is in the group of 24 years old and younger which passed from 30,91 to 37,10 hours usually worked, while the group of 55 years and older reduced a little its hours from 36,26 to 35,67 hours. We also noted a decrease in unpaid overtime, notably in the category

⁴ The results were carefully revised to ensure that the constraints imposed by Statistics Canada were respected (No dissemination of data where there are less than 5 respondents in a given cell of a table.)

of the 35-44 years which passed from 2,22 to 1,46 hours, while the group of 45-54 passed from 2,38 to 2,18 hours. Other age groups show less overtime than these previous two groups, which are however most likely to have family and parental responsibilities. We notice a reduction of the volume of paid overtime, although not as considerable as unpaid hours. At the same time, it is interesting to note that the number of working days a week increased in all groups between 1999 and 2002. In summary, the working time did not really decrease, except for supplementary hours. However, the blocks of spare time are reduced due to an increase in the number of days over which the work is done.

We also observed from the data of tables 1 and 2 an increase in working hours at home for all age groups. We also note that this practice is more common with older workers, which confirms the fact that working from home, or telework, is often appreciated by older workers (Tremblay, 2001; Tremblay, Renaud, Najem, 2006). Working at home is sometimes perceived as a way of conciliating family and professional responsibilities (Tremblay, 2002), but it can also however contribute to making it more difficult to draw the line between working time and the personal/family time; which could be perceived as a negative work intrusion in the private life (Baines and Gelder, 2003).

TABLE 1
WORKING SCHEDULES, BY AGE GROUP IN 1999, IN NUMBER OF HOURS

	LT< 24 yrs	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-54 yrs	55 and +
Usual work hours	30,91	37,41	37,65	36,97	36,26
Unpaid overtime	0,60	2,10	2,22	2,38	2,02
Paid overtime	1,02	1,35	1,16	0,73	0,78
Nbr of workdays per week	3,93	4,35	4,32	4,37	4,37
Weekly hours worked at home	3,98	4,91	5,27	6,06	7,54

TABLE 2
WORKING SCHEDULES, BY AGE GROUP 2002, IN NUMBER OF HOURS

	LT<24 yrs	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-54 yrs	55 and +
Usual work hours	37,10	37,09	37,86	37,20	35,67
Unpaid overtime	0,66	1,27	1,46	2,18	0,91
Paid overtime	0,09	0,70	0,79	0,94	0,17
Nbr of workdays per week	4,30	4,74	4,85	4,82	4,77
Weekly hours worked at home	2,92	5,19	5,49	7,19	7,85

Some working arrangements can be source of additional difficulties. The shift schedules as well as the changing hours or workdays can also present difficulties for the employees trying to reconcile their personal and family obligations. In this respect, the data of table 3 and 4 indicate that the shift schedules are in progress in all the age groups, except for the 55 and older, where this schedule is less frequent; the percentages here represent the percentage of those without same hours each day and same days each week who have rotating schedules. However, it seems that increasing percentages of individuals, in each group, work the same hours every day and the same days every week. However, by reversing the percentages on the subject, we realize that in 2002 between 25 and 30 % of individuals still did not work the same hours every day and 30 to 35 % did not work the same days every week.

TABLE 3
DIVERSIFIED WORKING SCHEDULES ACCORDING TO THE AGE GROUP IN 1999,
IN PERCENTAGE (%)

	LT<24 yrs	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-54 yrs	55 and +
Same hours every day	58,34	54,24	61,19	60,37	54,01
Same days every week	60,84	58,80	60,82	57,18	59,93
Of those without same hours and days: Rotating shifts schedule	23,72	42,75	38,68	50,79	34,95

TABLE 4
DIVERSIFIED WORKING SCHEDULES ACCORDING TO THE AGE GROUP IN
2002, IN PERCENTAGE (%)

	LT<24 yrs	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-54 yrs	55 and +
Same hours every day	75,86	72,92	70,65	68,23	74,55
Same days every week	77,12	64,82	66,09	65,47	71,48
Of those without same hours and days: Rotating shifts schedule	30,85	59,40	52,91	48,04	33,22

Aspirations in matters of working time

The employees' aspirations in working time were often debated in Quebec and Canada. A survey conducted by Human Resources and Social Development Canada in the 1990s indicated that only 6 % of the population expressed their desire to reduce their working time (HRDC-DRHC, 1997). However, if they received a partial wage compensation for the incurred losses,

66% of the members of the *Centrale de l'Enseignement du Québec* (CEQ) were favorable to a reduction of their working time as mentioned in a survey conducted by the CEQ in the 1990s (FTQ-CEQ-CSN, 1995). Finally, 48,8 % of the respondents of a survey conducted by the F.T.Q. would agree to reduce their working time without compensation or with a partial compensation of their salary (FTQ-CEQ-CSN, 1995). Since these last surveys were performed on small samples not representative of the population in general, we wanted to analyze the question from the data of the WES, especially since it explains the motives justifying such a reduced workweek (RWW).

The data of tables 5 and 6 highlight the link between the age and the desire to increase or reduce the working hours. The youngest aspire to longer hours, while the categories the most susceptible to have family responsibilities (25-34; 35-44 and 45-54) are those who are the most interested in a reduced workweek. The people of 55 years of age and older were also interested in a reduced workweek in 1999, but not as many in 2002. However, it is necessary to note that the majority of employees are satisfied with their working hours, since only a minority wishes to change them.

Moreover, the data of 1999 and 2002 indicate that the family obligations and the desire to get more leisure time are the most mentioned motives among the minority wishing to reduce their hours (from 0,64 % to 11,67 %). Thus, in 2002, more than 45 % of the group of 25-34 years, wish to reduce their hours for family obligations while this number exceeds 60 % for the 35-44 years and 50 % for the 45-54 age group. The percentage gradually reduces for the following age groups. In the case of these last age groups, it is especially the desire to have more leisure time that explains the interest for the RWW.

TABLE 5
ASPIRATIONS IN MATTERS OF WORKING TIME ACCORDING TO THE AGE GROUP IN 1999

	LT<24 yrs	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-54 yrs	55 and +
Wants additional hours	37,72	22,76	16,73	14,68	10,15
Wants reduced hours	2,34	8,55	11,67	11,17	10,01
Reduce for family obligations	55,38	41,47	54,04	34,91	10,81
Reduce for stress related to work	22,93	18,80	18,38	19,48	8,56
Reduce for more leisure time	23,70	49,80	51,30	60,66	65,78

TABLE 6
ASPIRATIONS IN MATTERS OF WORKING TIME ACCORDING TO THE AGE
GROUP IN 2002

	LT<24 yrs	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-54 yrs	55 and +
Wants additional hours	39,70	24,28	18,53	14,55	11,87
Wants reduced hours	0,64	7,27	8,56	10,64	6,62
Reduce for family obligations	43,06	46,00	60,38	53,05	21,77
Reduce for stress related to work	22,26	23,54	26,76	42,65	22,08
Reduce for more leisure time	50,07	56,75	54,71	65,33	63,24

Working time arrangements

We mentioned above that working at home is sometimes perceived as a way of reconciling family and professional responsibilities (Tremblay, 2002), but that it can also be perceived as a negative work intrusion in personal life (Baines and Gelder, 2003). We observed (see tables 1 and 2) an increase of working hours at home for all age groups and noted that this practice gains more popularity as we get older. Tables 7 and 8⁴ provide additional information on the subject and indicate that work requirements explain why the individuals sometimes work at home. We also observe that this practice decreased or remained stable in all age groups; while we cannot claim that working at home is a developing practice, at least for this recent period, the number of hours worked from home is still important (around 6 hours per week) and this is generally because of work requirements.

Family obligations are not a predominant reason for working at home but it is interesting to note the relatively high percentage of respondents who work at home for other reasons, including aiming for better working conditions, hoping to get more spare time and saving money. This latest result confirms in part those based on researches on telework (CEFRIO, 2001) which indicated that time and money saving were the primary motives of choosing this type of work.

Also, other analyses of the data show that workers with children more often work at home for family reasons, the percentage being in the range of 6 to 7 %.

With regards to the working time arrangements, we note that the compressed workweek is more accessible to the young employees (younger than 24 years) and to the 55-year-old and over in 2002, compared to 1999, when other groups benefited more from this opportunity. However, this measure is not frequently used, the percentage being always lower than 10 %, except for the 25-34- year-old in 1999. The reduced workweek on the grounds of a special agreement with the employer also diminished in all the age groups, but particularly in the 25-34, 35-44 and 45-54 groups, so we can deduct that this measure does not seem to be favoured by the employees.

⁴ Tables 7 and 8 present the mention less than 1 % in relation to the family obligations motive for the work at home. As for the motive "other reasons" of these same tables, it includes looking for better work conditions, gaining time and saving money.

Finally, as for the flexible time, the younger groups seem to prefer this option (less than 24 year olds and 25-34); the other age groups demonstrate less interest, the percentage decreasing from 1999 till 2002.

TABLE 7
THE TIME MANAGEMENT MEASURES ACCORDING TO THE AGE GROUP IN 1999

	LT<24 yrs	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-54 yrs	55 and +
Work at home	8,83	26,91	30,48	28,24	28,37
Work at home for work requirements	63,83	66,05	65,66	66,35	63,75
Work at home for family obligations	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1
Work at home for other reasons	30,41	27,28	29,85	31,11	36,05
Compressed workweek	4,92	11,22	9,95	9,43	5,14
Reduced workweek	17,68	14,59	11,73	13,84	10,90
Flexible time	45,06	40,28	40,08	36,21	39,65

TABLE 8
THE TIME MANAGEMENT MEASURES ACCORDING TO THE AGE GROUP IN 2002

	LT<24 yrs	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-54 yrs	55 and +
Work at home	9,16	22,03	29,12	29,76	25,40
Work at home for work requirements	45,31	65,51	72,07	56,55	57,89
Work at home for family obligations	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1
Work at home for other reasons	54,16	26,97	22,06	36,79	40,37
Compressed workweek	8,97	6,55	5,78	6,64	6,93
Reduced workweek	14,60	6,78	6,36	6,29	10,50
Flexible time	50,43	40,66	38,83	33,49	29,29

DISCUSSION

The data presented in this article indicates in general that the progress observed as regards to the social debate on work-family balance was not necessarily translated by an important

improvement of the facilitating conditions of the work environments, whether it be for parents or for aging workers. Moreover, in some respects, there was even some decline, making conflicting work-family balance requirements even more difficult.

Concerning our preoccupation with aging and activity rates, it is difficult to conclude that aging workers want reduced working time, since there are even more who wish an increase in their working time. In fact, about one fifth of workers aged 55 and over actually work part time in Canada, so it may be that many of them would want to work more hours, while another percentage would want reduced hours.

As concerns working hours in general, there was no one-way for the movements of the four years studied. We note however an insignificant increase of the working hours for the younger than 24- year-old, most likely signifying an improvement of the conditions of the labour market. We also note that the groups which are most susceptible to face difficulties in the reconciliation of their different needs do not report any decrease of working hours, including the most pressurized group of 35-44-year-old.

In opposition, there was a reduction of supplementary hours, but this gain of time is largely compensated by a loss of personal flexibility caused by the average number of days worked per week which is on the increase among all age groups. It is the same scenario for the working hours at home, except for the less than 24 year olds. Indeed, this last indicator could be perceived as an indication of greater flexibility for the employees. However, the data demonstrates that the situation is quite different in the sense that people do not work at home to better reconcile their obligations, but rather because of the work requirements. Conclusively, we witness here a work overflow on the personal life instead of a practice offering more flexibility to the individual in his time management. Furthermore, this overflow was more important in 2002 than in 1999 for the three groups of 35 years and older. Some qualitative research may be needed to determine to what extent aging workers are satisfied and want to work at home, as previous research had indicated (Cefrio, 2001).

Between 1999 and 2002, the degree of stability of working hours increased in both cases of regularity of the daily working schedules and worked weekdays. On the other hand, in comparison, we notice an increase of the percentage of the workers among the three age groups of 44-year-old and younger who work on shift schedules. The improvement of the stability seen above is then invalidated and this is surely not a positive element to try to convince people to work longer, as was shown in some analysis of nurses in Québec, who tend to leave hospitals for private care in order to be rid of shift schedules (David, 2007).

Regarding working time arrangements, it is difficult to draw any conclusion about flexible time. However, we notice movements in both directions on the incidence of this type of schedule. Concerning the incidence of the reduced workweek, data shows a decrease of this practice. It seems indeed more difficult than before to reduce working hours. As for the compressed workweek, its incidence increases for the groups younger than 25 years and older than 55 years, but decreases in a substantial way for the other three groups, which are the most susceptible to meet difficulties with the reconciliation of work/family obligations. It is however clear that aging workers appreciate to have more time as was shown in other research (Tremblay, 2004).

Compared to what we observed in other writings, the data show that, no matter the age groups, there is a larger number of Canadians wanting to increase their working hours rather than reduce them. This phenomenon, instead of decreasing in 2002, increases compared to 1999. Among the group wanting to reduce their hours, we notice that it is especially to increase their

leisure time, except for the group of 35 – 44-year-old, who would prefer this reduction mainly to better meet their family responsibilities. From 25 to 54 years there is also an important percentage wanting to reduce its hours for family obligations. This difference in comparison with higher percentages mentioned earlier could possibly be explained by the fact that Quebeckers are more sensitive to the questions of reduced working time than their Canadian colleagues, being closer to the European and French debates on such issues, but we should also note that the survey conducted here does not concern exclusively the parents, which was the case of other surveys stating the parents' interest for the reduced workweek, notably the parents of young children.

Although the analyzed data does not allow to take into account the underlying influences in the key trends, we believe that, in the current context, the economic pressures appeared to slow down social progress on work-life balance issues and the challenge of the aging population might bring working time arrangements to the top of the agenda in coming years. Certainly, at the macro-social level, some labour market actors, especially unions, wish that the work environments would take into account aging workers needs as well as allow a better work-family balance with the adoption of facilitating and innovating practices. However, from the company standpoint, the changes do not seem to be made to this day. It is undoubtedly because the flexibility in the management of the employee's working time often represents an increased rigidity for the employer in its capacity to use workers when he considers it convenient for operational motives. In a context of increased competition between firms, it is not thus surprising to see that the volunteerism or *laissez-faire* attitude does not lead to much progress. However, considering the challenges related to aging as well as difficulties of work-family balancing stated above, firms will surely have to take this dimension into account, and the State may have to impose standards or offer incentives to firms who develop programs to allow workers to have more options as concerns work organization and working time, as has been done in certain European countries. For example, Finland has adopted policies to favour flexible working hours for aging workers, while UK and the Netherlands have adopted a law which provides workers the possibility to ask for working time adjustments or reductions for family or personal reasons; the employer must accept the arrangement unless these impede production or create important problems, and the employer must then justify his refusal. Considering aging and work-life challenges, it appears that a policy on work-life balance throughout the life course would surely be a welcome innovation in many countries and firms.

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