



**Work, age and working time preferences:
Towards a new articulation of social times over the life-course?**

Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay

And Elmustapha Najem

**Research Note no 2009-2
Of the CURA (Community University Research Alliance)
On work-life articulation over the lifecourse**

**Note de recherche no 2009-2
De l'ARUC (Alliance de recherche université-communauté)
Sur la gestion des âges et des temps sociaux**

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Abstract

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 responsibilities. The aging population, which will lead to a reduced supply of labour over the coming years, this is a problem which confronts all nations. A few possibilities are open, but the essence of the solution lies in an increase of working hours and in activity rates. In this context, we undertook a research on working time and workers' aspirations in Canada in this context. Also, in the context of the financial and economic crisis which has started in 2008, employees' right to employment and to working time reduction in order to share employment will surely be debated again. The present article analyses the evolution of employed peoples' work time in Canada, on the basis of a large sample of the Canadian labour market in the Workplace Employee Survey, for the years 1999 and 2004, in order to determine what aging workers desire for the end of their active life and study the evolution over recent years. Our hypothesis was that many would want reduced hours, but we found that many would also want increased hours.

Keywords: work, working time, labour, working time reduction, social times, family, aging

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 responsibilities. The context of an aging population leads to a reduced labour supply over the coming years, a problem which confronts all nations, but Québec and Canada with somewhat more severity than the US. In order to solve the problem and maintain their standard of living, a few options are open to nations, but basically, even if productivity may be increased, the essence of the solution lies in an increase of working hours and an increase in activity rates. Also, in the context of the financial and economic crisis which has started in 2008 and might go on for a few years, employees' right to employment, and their right to specific forms of employment such as reduced hours, part time, partial retirement, will be debated.

The right to employment and working time reduction in order to share employment – or to keep a decent level of revenue in the context of diminishing financial returns as well as important losses in pension regimes – has already come up in many public debates, as well as in employer-employee negotiations, as has often been the case in times of economic crisis. In Quebec and Canada for example, employees' aspirations as concerns working time reduction, job-sharing and the like were often debated in recent decades, but especially following the 1980-1981 crisis, as well as that of 1991-1992. Over recent years, the issue of work-life balance has also brought the issue of long working hours on the agenda (Families and Work Institute, 1997, 1998). Finally, over recent months, the issue of diminishing pension plans, of financial hardships of retirees has come back on top of the agenda, and many are now seeking paid employment in order to retain a decent income.

Thus, the debate on working hours has come back to the top of the agenda, with the difficult economic conditions ahead, since many aging workers would like to work to earn more income, but they do not necessarily want to do so in the same full time type of job arrangement (Tremblay, Genin and Di Loreto, 2009). While some research gives indications on workers' preferences (Gosselin, Paquet and Marcoux, 2008), most of the data is not representative of the whole population, but rather concerns specific groups of workers or limited numbers. This is why we wanted to analyse some representative data to determine what are the aspirations of various cohorts of workers in terms of working hours, in order to better understand what policies and programs would be desirable in the present context. The present article intends to gain better knowledge on these aspirations by analyzing the evolution of work hours and working time aspirations for different age groups in Canada, on the basis of a large sample of the Canadian labour market on the issues of workers' actual hours and aspirations as regards working time and working arrangements.

1.Literature review, research questions and hypothesis

Population aging and demographic decline present enormous challenges in many countries at the moment. Québec is the Canadian province which presents the most challenges and will age most quickly, but Canada follows close behind and both the Québec and the Canadian government are preoccupied with this issue, as many other OECD countries (Tremblay, 2007, ed.). The working age group (15-64) will start shrinking around 2008 in Québec, while the 65 and over will increase their share and the 0-14 will decrease their share substantially. This obviously presents important

financial challenges for public budgets, the costs of an aging population resting on lower numbers of active workers. In Canada, the situation is similar, although the decrease in working age group comes a little later.

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, both zones being the main references for these issues because the majority of economic exchanges are with these two zones. Even if there has been an increase in the activity rate of this group in Québec over recent years, 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.

In any case, most industrialized countries are searching for ways to encourage higher participation rates in the context of these demographic challenges. 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, which can impact on the number of hours and participation rates of younger cohorts.

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 (Duxbury et al., 1993; Tremblay, 2004a; Families and Work Institute, 1997, 1998). 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 children staying at home longer, or returning to the family residence in times of unemployment or precarious employment, as well as the necessity for many households to provide care to aging parents.

The 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 (hospitals releasing people more quickly after interventions), have to provide care to aging parents in loss of autonomy, or to physically or mentally disabled persons. The increased participation of women in the labour market is important to compensate for demographic decline, but it poses other challenges, since family and parental responsibilities and tasks generally remain the load of women. (Tremblay, 2004a; 2008a)

The sphere of work is also in full change. The current management dogma, which are characterized by criteria such as "just-in-time" and continuous and intensive production, encourage the employers to demand always more flexibility: flexibility in working hours, in employee's status, costs of work, 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 organizing childcare, school, doctor's, dentist's or other appointments, in other words tending to family needs and obligations ; the organization of the everyday life can thus become very difficult.

As women entered the labour market and as the roles between men and women were redefined, both spheres became communicating vases: family life suffers the repercussions of the increasing demands from the world of work and, on the other side, the world of work suffers from the impacts of elements which destabilize the family. All of this contributes to emphasize the problem of the conflict between personal life and professional life, or work-life balance for short. (Nelson and Quick, 1985; Duxbury et al., 1993; Families and Work Institute, 1997, 1998).

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 (Vandelac and Tissot, 1999; Baines and Gelder, 2003, Carlson, 2000, Tremblay, 2004a) and the increased interest of fathers in the issue (Tremblay, 2003), which has made work-family issues no longer “women’s” issues, but real social issues, that concern all, men and women, as well as businesses and the State. 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 identified some determining variables, namely working hours, the persons' age and the number of children. (Tremblay, 2004b). Thus, in order to try to validate these first results concerning the importance of working hours for work-life balance, while comparing young and aging workers' aspirations, we decided to analyse a the data from a Statistics Canada survey which can give answers to a certain number of questions with representative data. The economic crisis which started in 2008 and will probably go on some time, only makes the issue of working time all the more important. Our research questions are thus the following:

Will aging workers want to remain in work longer, and if so at what conditions? Are aging workers' aspirations different from the younger groups or are the motives for these aspirations different?

Gosselin, Paquet and Marcoux (2008) have found that aging workers change their attitude towards their work and seek for better organization of working time at the end of their career. Tremblay, Genin and Di Loreto (2009) did a survey with aging and retired workers and observed that many would like to end their career with more flexible hours and that this would lead them to stay in the labour market longer. However, there is no clear response to the issue of length of the work week desired and the previous research also is not based on a representative sample. While the Statistics Canada survey presents the advantage of representativity, it unfortunately does not ask as precise questions concerning working time flexibility aspirations, but nevertheless gives some elements as concerns the present working conditions of different age groups, and the aspirations concerning the length of the workweek (aspiration to increase or decrease it).

We thus put forward the following hypothesis:

H1: aging workers would like to reduce their working time in order to stay in the labour market and gain revenue.

H2: the motives for reduction in working time will rest more on leisure issues than on family obligations in the case of aging workers in comparison with the younger groups.

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 work-family balance (35-44) are more or less favored compared to the aging workers from the point of view of working time schedules,

while seeing how their aspirations may be different. This will help shed light on the options open for the future, in terms of working time for various groups. Indeed, working time reductions might make it possible to develop some forms of job-sharing, as has often been the case in times of economic uncertainty. (Tremblay, 2008a,b) Not only do questions of working time arise in this context, but they are often related to the means to ensure economic security, as is the case for the debate on flexicurity (Tremblay, 2008, ed.) : how to ensure flexibility for firms who are in difficult economic situations, but also ensure security for workers in these difficult times ? The issue of working time arrangements and reduction is part of the answer to this challenge of flexicurity, and the data presented here will give indications on some measures which may help alleviate the difficulties of the present economic crisis, while favoring a better balance between work, family and personal life at all ages.

2. Methodology and 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 access to data representative of the Canadian labour market. Based on this 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 as having more difficulties of work-family balance, is more affected than the others by long schedules (regular hours and overtime). We also wanted to determine if aging workers have access to more working time arrangements, which are favourable to work-family balance, and finally, we were interested in aspirations according to age as regards to working time.

For the purposes of the present research, we used, on a merged basis, the data gathered from the employers and the answers supplied by the employees in the Workplace and Employee Survey (WES).¹ The WES covers a representative sample of the Canadian labour market, with the exception of the federal, provincial and municipal public services which are excluded. The data was collected amongst 6 000 companies and some 23 000 workers of these same companies (Statistics Canada, 2004). The data used is from the 1999 and 2004 surveys, the last one available to us for analysis.

3. The results of the analysis

In the light of the questions presented above, we shall analyse the data in order 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-years) as well as aging workers have longer or shorter

¹ Indeed, the WES includes two data banks, the employers' and the employees', containing together several hundreds of indicators. Data banks are built in order to be able to be merged to get all available information on an employee and the firm which employs him or her. Results presented here are derived from the merger of these two banks. The survey is not centered on working time issues, covering many other workplace issues such as training, work organization, participation in the workplace, but we concentrate on working time issues, as indicated in the research plan accepted by Statistics Canada. Researchers have to present their project to Statistics Canada, in order to be granted access to the specific data sets, and this access was granted to us with our colleagues Elmustapha Najem and Renaud Paquet.

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 flexible working time measures, among which the reduced or compressed workweek, a measure known as favouring a certain work-family balance and also appearing to interest aging workers, according to another, more limited, survey (Tremblay et al, 2009).

Working schedules according to the age group

Tables 1 and 2 present the hours usually worked according to the age group in 1999 and 2004. The most important change is in the group of 24 years old and younger which passed from 30,91 to 35,57 hours usually worked, while the group of 55 years and older is rather stable, with a slight increase from 36,26 to 36,96 hours. We also noted an increase in unpaid overtime, notably in the category of the 35-44 and 45-54 years. 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 in a week increased slightly in all groups between 1999 and 2004. In summary, the working time did not really decrease, except for supplementary hours. However, the blocks of spare time can be 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). We must note however that for the 45-54 and the 55 and over groups, the number of hours of work done at home has reduced somewhat, since it was 7,19 and 7,85 in 2002. 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 because of permeability of working and non working times (Tremblay and Genin, 2009), which could be perceived as a negative work intrusion in the private life (Baines and Gelder, 2003). However, it seems aging workers often appreciate working from home, especially if it reduces considerably the number of hours spent in commuting. (Tremblay et al, 2007, 2006).

Table 1
Working schedules according to the age group in 1999, in number of hours

	Less than 24 years	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	3,98	4,91	5,27	6,06	7,54

home					
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Table 2
Working schedules according to the age group in 2004, in number of hours

	Less than 24 years	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-54 yrs	55 and +
Usual work hours	35,57	38,66	38,31	38,25	36,96
Unpaid overtime	0,34	1,92	2,29	2,25	1,47
Paid overtime	0,64	0,78	0,99	0,91	0,26
Nbr of workdays per week	4,59	4,88	4,86	4,85	4,77
Weekly hours worked at home	3,96	5,02	5,33	5,29	5,83

Table 2A. Weekly hours worked at home in 2002

	Less than 24 years	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-54 yrs	55 and +
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 from 1999-2002 (2004 not available) 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. Also, 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 (%)

	Less than 24 years	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
Rotating shifts (% of those not included above)	23,72	42,75	38,68	50,79	34,95

Table 4
Diversified working schedules according to the age group in 2002, in percentage (%)

	Less than 24 years	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
Rotating shifts (% of those not included above)	30,85	59,40	52,91	48,04	33,22

Aspirations as concerns working time

As mentioned, employees' aspirations as concerns working time were often discussed in Canada, especially following the debate on working time reduction aimed at reducing unemployment in France. This debate was also important in Canada, following the 1980-1981 and 1991-1992 crises, and it might reappear in the coming years, with the difficult economic conditions ahead. 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 a Québec union, the *Centrale de l'Enseignement du Québec* (CEQ), were favourable to a reduction of their working time, as mentioned in a survey conducted by the CEQ in the 1990s (FTQ-CEQ-CSN, 1995). Also, 48,8 % of the respondents of a survey conducted by another union, the Québec Federation of workers (FTQ) 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).

Tables 5 and 6 highlight the link between 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 and older were also interested in a reduced workweek in 1999, but not as many in 2004. 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 2004 indicate that family obligations and the desire to get more leisure time are the most mentioned motives among the people wishing to reduce their hours. Thus, in 2004, over 57 % of the group of 25-34 years wish to reduce their hours for family obligations while this number exceeds 56 % for the 35-44 years and 31 % for the 45-54 age group. The percentage reduces for the 55 and over, who have less family obligations, at least as concerns children, since other research shows that more and more people are responsible for an elderly or sick parent, which is another form of family obligation. In the case of the 55 and over as well as 45-54 groups, it is especially the desire to have more leisure time that explains the interest for the RWW. We note however that the desire for additional hours is clearly more important than the desire to reduce working hours in 2004, which means that while our first

hypothesis is supported by the 1999 data, it is no longer supported in 2004. We also observe that it is for more leisure that the aging workers want a reduction in working time, which confirms the second hypothesis presented above.

Table 5
Aspirations in matters of working time according to the age group in 1999

	Less than 24 years	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 2004

	Less than 24 years	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-54 yrs	55 and +
Wants additional hours	37,17	23,65	18,86	14,61	11,97
Wants reduced hours	1,69	5,27	9,02	9,90	6,32
Reduce for family obligations	39,79	57,40	56,12	31,68	17,73
Reduce for stress related to work	3,29	11,23	20,73	31,69	13,69
Reduce for more leisure time	34,68	45,47	42,13	57,43	69,93

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 above (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 8² indicate that work requirements explain why 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. Only 5 % of workers have access to a regular telework program according to this survey, so we can conclude that the other 15-20 % bringing work home do so in order to catch up on work that they have not had time to complete at the office.

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 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. In a previous research, we had observed that aging workers were particularly interested in working from home, some of them going as far as to say that they would prefer to quit their job rather than have to go back to working at the office. (Tremblay, 2001, Cefrio, 2001)

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 %. (Tremblay, Paquet and Najem, 2007)

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 2004, 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 this measure may become more interesting in the context of the economic crisis, a reduced working time being an interesting way to share employment (or unemployment, depending on the point of view) and workers are usually more interested in various types of job-sharing schemes in the context of difficult economic times (Tremblay, 2008b). Employers often refuse these demands, but may find it interesting to introduce them in difficult economic times in order not to lose workers who may be useful once the crisis is over.

⁴ Tables 7 and 8 indicate “ 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.

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

	Less than 24 years	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
2004

	Less than 24 years	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-54 yrs	55 and +
Work at home	8,19	24,60	25,84	28,27	21,74
Work at home for work requirements	73,62	70,66	68,99	64,93	63,56
Work at home for family obligations	< 1.0	< 1.0	< 1.0	< 1.0	< 1.0
Work at home for other reasons	21,26	24,68	25,38	32,36	35,30
Compressed workweek	9,44	7,57	6,65	5,32	6,19

Reduced workweek

13,07

5,14

5,76

5,19

10,78

Discussion and conclusion

The data presented in this article indicate that there has not been much progress observed as regards the evolution of working time arrangements. Thus, it appears that the social debate on work-life issues has not necessarily translated into an important improvement of conditions of work, especially when one considers the importance of work done at home, often on top of regular hours (only 5 % have access to regular telework, the other 15-20 % bringing work home in order to catch up on work). Concerning our preoccupation with aging and labour market participation 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 – and this percentage may increase with the economic crisis – , while another percentage would want reduced hours. Indeed some would like reduced hours, mainly in the 35-54 groups to better balance work and family; in the 55 + group, the desire to reduce hours is mainly explained by the wish to have more leisure, but also sometimes (17 % of 55+) for family obligations. While many are satisfied with their hours, it appears a certain number (16 %) would appreciate reduced (6 %) or increased hours (10 %). Tremblay et al (2009) have also indicated they would appreciate more flexible hours.

As concerns working hours in general, there was no one-way for the movements over the five years studied. We note however an increase of the working hours for the younger than 24-year-old, most likely signifying an improvement of the conditions of the labour market over those years, something which may change in the coming years. We also observe that the groups which are most susceptible to face difficulties in the reconciliation of their different needs (family and work essentially) do not report any decrease of working hours, including the most pressurized group of 35-44-year-old.

On the contrary, there was a reduction of overtime, but this 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 as concerns 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 shows 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. We witness here more permeability between work and non work (Tremblay and Genin, 2009), as well as a work overflow into 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, although it appears to have diminished in 2004.

Between 1999 and 2004, the stability of working hours increased in both cases of regularity of the daily working schedules and worked weekdays. The improvement in the stability is however somewhat invalidated by the non negligible percentage of persons working on shift or rotating schedules, 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).

Concerning the incidence of the reduced workweek, data shows a decrease of this practice. It seems indeed more difficult than before to have access to reduced working hours in many organizations, because of the many retirements and reduced hiring. This might change in private businesses confronted with the crisis, since they might want to reduce working hours for their employees rather than lose experienced workers they will need later. While North American employees do not have a right to reduced working hours for family or personal reasons, as is the case in the Netherlands and in the UK (Tremblay, 2008ba,b) the advent of the crisis might make companies more open to these types of demands from workers.

Compared to what was written in various publications, the data show that, no matter the age group, there is a larger number of Canadians wanting to increase their working hours rather than reduce them. This phenomenon, instead of decreasing in 2004, increases a little compared to 1999. Among the groups wanting to reduce their hours, we notice that it is especially to increase their leisure time for the 55 + , except for the group of 25 – 44-year-old, who would prefer this reduction mainly to better meet their family responsibilities.

Although the data does not allow to take into account the underlying influences in the key trends, we believe that, in the current context, the intensification of work over recent years has surely slowed down social progress on work-life balance issues and the rights of workers to reduced working time or other arrangements. However, the present economic crisis might make firms more open to various working arrangements such as working time reduction or job sharing, in order to maintain the competence base of the organization. This may be the case all the more so for the 55 + group, since the issue of the aging population might bring working time arrangements to the top of the agenda. Certainly, at the macro-social level, some labour market actors, especially unions, would like the work environment and business to take into account aging workers' needs as well as allow a better work-family balance, with the adoption of innovative practices. If working time flexibility has not developed as much as expected, it is undoubtedly because flexibility of employees' working time often represents an increased rigidity for the employer in his capacity to use workers when he considers it convenient for operational motives. Thus, from the company stand point, the changes do not seem to be made to this day, but difficult economic times might make room for change. Considering the challenges related to an aging population, those related to the financial and economic crisis, as well as difficulties of work-family balancing observed in many age groups (25-45 mainly, but also into 54 years), firms and states will surely have to develop new working time arrangements in order to face the crisis, but also to respond more adequately to the demands of workers of various ages concerning working time arrangements which can facilitate a better work-life balance over the lifecourse.

In terms of future research, it will be interesting to study future developments, when future waves of the survey are made available to researchers, since the trends from 1999 to 2004 seem to vary. Some qualitative research may also be needed to determine to what extent aging workers are satisfied with telework and actually want to work at home, as previous research had indicated (Cefrio, 2001). This may be important to retain these experienced workers in the workforce in the context of demographic decline, but also to facilitate their right to work in the context of difficult economic conditions, since many appreciate working from home because of the gain in time and money that it permits. (Cefrio, 2001, Tremblay, 2001)

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