

# Dealing with Work-Life Conflict: Rhetoric Versus Reality?

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# What triggered my interest in Work-Life issues?

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# And why my interest in balance continues

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# Outline

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- Setting the Stage
- What is the impact of high role overload and work interferes with family on key stakeholders?
- What causes these forms of work-life conflict?
- How can we reduce role overload?
- How can we reduce work interferes with family?
- Conclusions

# Reducing Work-Life Conflict and Stress: What works? What does not?

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- Answers to these questions are not straight forward
- What works?
  - Depends
- What does not work?
  - Many of the popular solutions
  - Focus on policies rather than practice

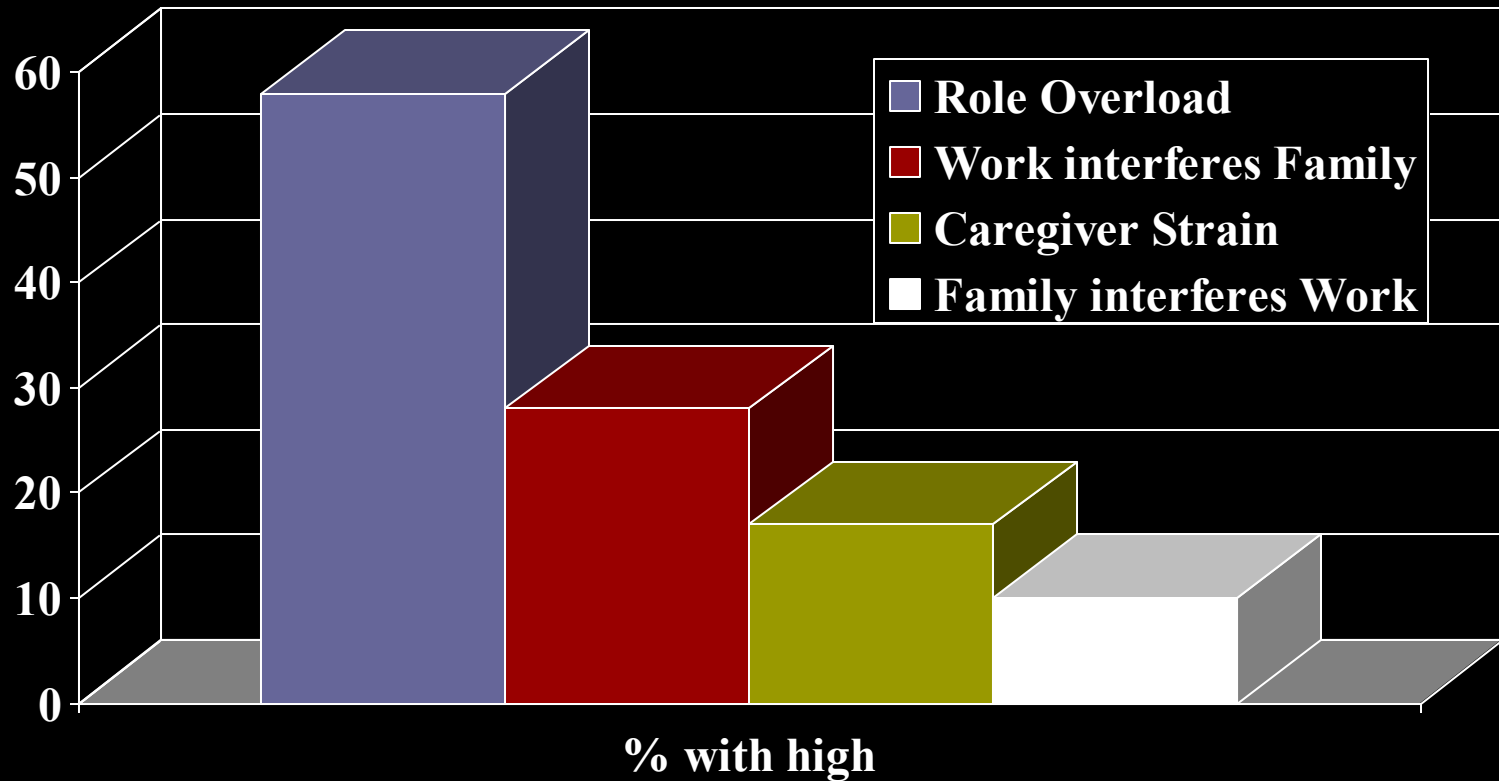
# Setting the Stage: What is work-life conflict anyway?

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- The parable of the blind man and the elephant
- Our research looks at four types of work-life conflict
  - Role overload
  - Work interferes with family
  - Family interferes with work
  - Caregiver strain

# Prevalence of various forms of work-life conflict

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# What does our research tell us about work-life conflict?

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- Work and life no longer separate domains for most of Canada's workforce
- The four components of work-life conflict have different impacts on the physical and mental health of Canadian employees
- Two most problematic forms of work-life conflict in Canada at this time:
  - Role Overload
  - Work Interferes with Family



# What does our research tell us about work-life conflict?

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- The main focus of this talk will be on these two forms of work-life conflict:
  - Reducing these two forms of conflict will yield the greatest “bang for the buck” for both employers and employees
  - Strategies to address overload also address work interferes with family and vice versa
- Will also talk about issues associated with eldercare as need to deal with this issue becoming more critical

# Role overload and work interferes with family

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- High levels of overload systemic in Canada's workforce
  - 60% of Canadian employees experience high levels of overload
  - Percent of employees with high role overload has increased dramatically over the past decade
    - 11% between 1991 and 2001
- Just over one in four Canadians (28%) report high levels of work interferes with family
  - Employees 4 times more likely to let work interfere with family than to let family get in the way of work

# Cost of Not Changing

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- Our data link high levels of role overload and work interferes with family to:
  - Increased absenteeism
  - Greater use of Canada's health care system
  - Increased levels of employee stress and depressed mood and higher intent to turnover
  - Higher benefits costs
  - Lower levels of commitment and job satisfaction
  - Recruitment and retention problems

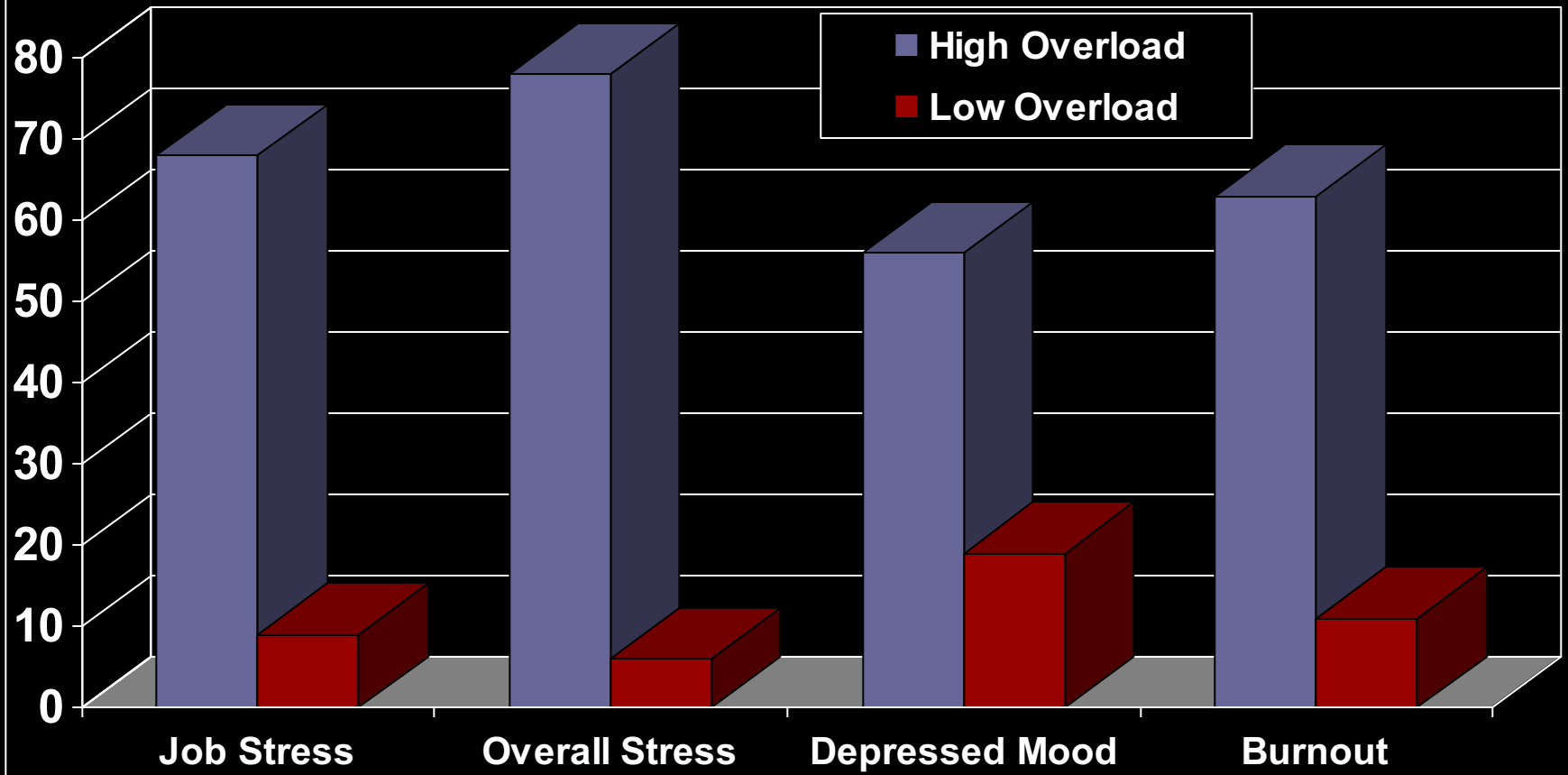
# Impact of High Role Overload on Key Organizational Outcomes

% with high levels of:

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# Impact of High Role Overload on Employee Mental % with high levels of



# Employers Could Substantially Reduce Absenteeism if They Reduced Role Overload and Work Interferes with Family

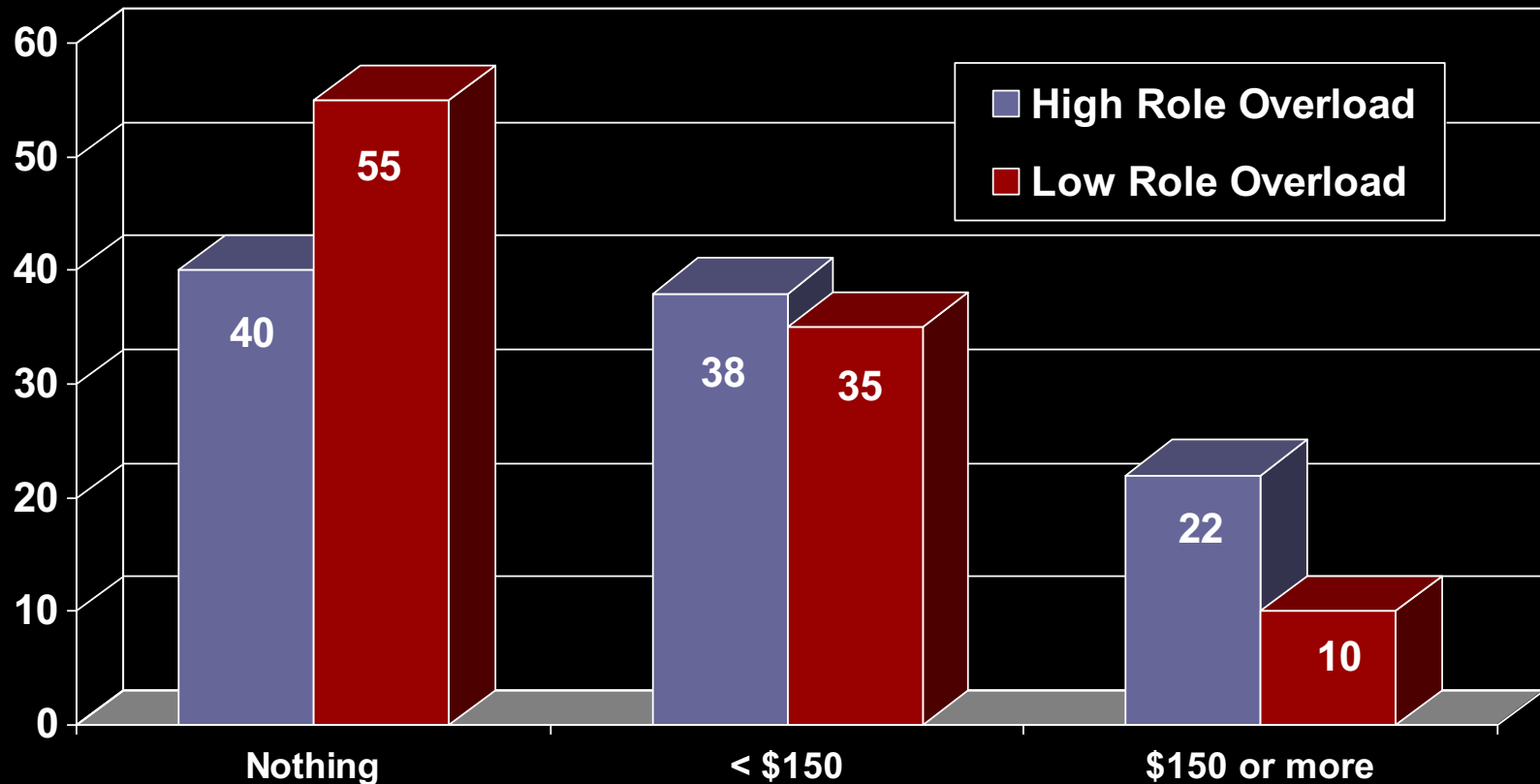
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- Our calculations indicate that employers could reduce absenteeism in their organization by:
  - 23% if they eliminated high levels of role overload
  - 6.3% if they eliminated high levels of work interferes with family

# They could also reduce the amount they spend on employee benefits

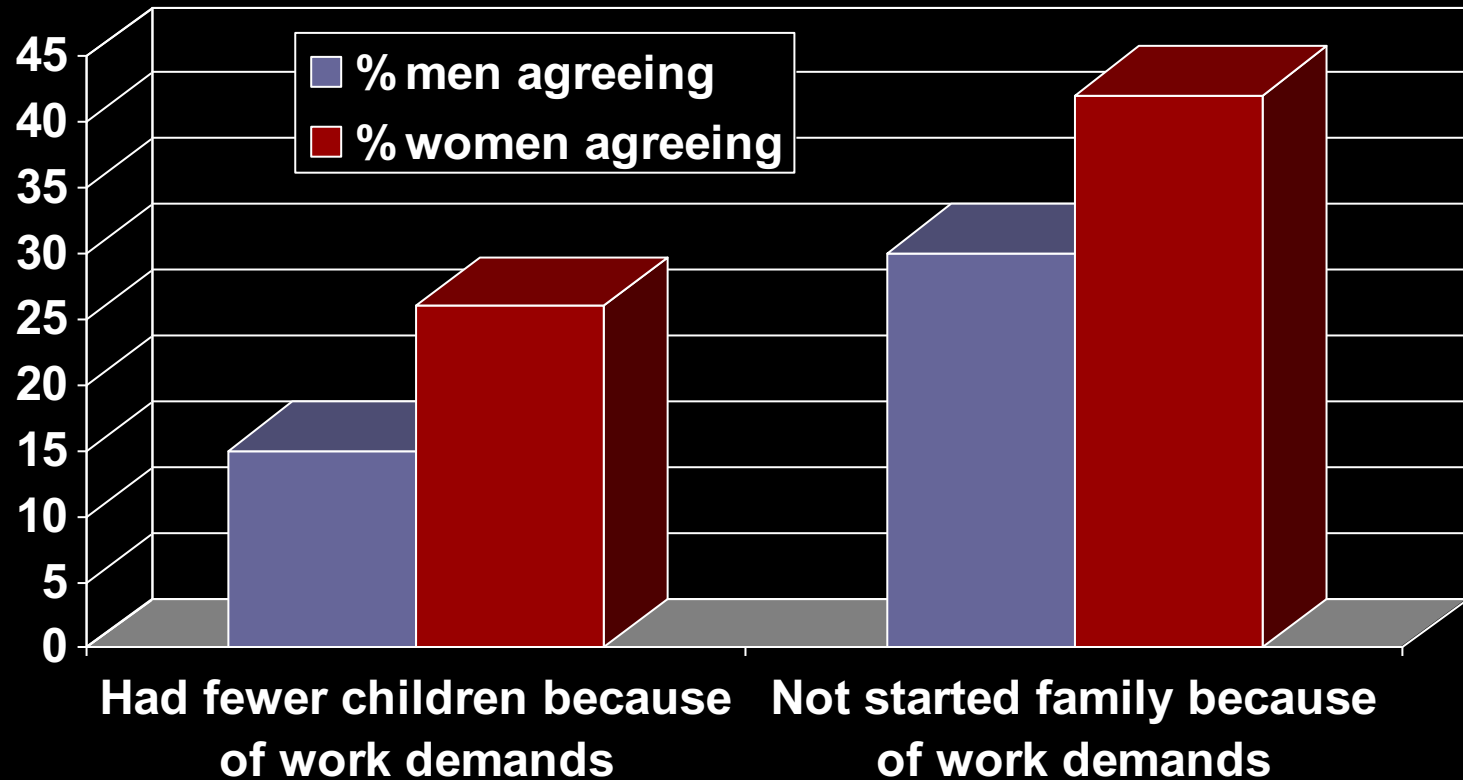
Over past six months Spent Following \$ on Prescription Medicine:

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# The Hidden Costs of Not Changing: Lower Birth Rates

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# Reducing Demands on Canada's Health Care System

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- By implementing policies that reduced role overload (from high to moderate) Canada could:
  - Reduce the number of physician visits by 25% per year,
  - Reduce the use of hospital emergency department visits by 23% per year, and
  - Reduce the number of in-patient hospital stays by 17% a year.

# Summary

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- Our national studies in this area leave little doubt that role overload and work interferes with family are associated with a number of indicators of substandard organizational performance
- Findings also indicate that employees who try and “do it all” and who “meet heavy work obligations at the expense of their family” are at risk of stress, burnout and depressed mood

# What causes these two forms of work-life conflict? – Two things

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## ■ Work demands

- High number of hours in work per week
- High number of hours in supplemental work at home

## ■ Organizational culture

- Culture of hours
- Culture focuses on policy not practice
- Culture talks people manages money and shareholder value

## ■ Demands at home are NOT associated with the incidence of these two forms of work life conflict

# But we have heard this all before! What is different now?

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- We have known for several decades that work-life conflict has a strong negative effect on an organization's bottom line
  - But organizations have not really addressed the issue

# But we have heard this all before! What is different now?

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- What is different now?
  - Recession followed by seller's market
- Our research has linked work life conflict and role overload to:
  - Recruitment,
  - Retention,
  - Succession planning
  - Knowledge transfer

# Work-life Issues for The Boomers

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- Balance has always been something that the Boomers desired but never quite achieved
- They plan on getting balance when they retire
  - Which will be sooner than you are counting on if you expect them to continue to work at the place that they have been for the last decade
- If you want to keep the Boomers with you, you have to explore reduce work options as well as phased retirement plans
  - Otherwise?
    - Retire on job or leave early

# Work-life Issues for Generation X

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- This is key issue for this group
  - Younger families, older parents
  - In their career ascendancy so work demands also increasing
  - This group have very high stress levels
- Feel Boomers are not serious about this issue
  - Boomers talk about balance but they are not sincere (do not walk the talk)
  - Think that having balance is “career limiting move”
  - Boomers expect that work comes first
  - Many have sacrificed families for job security and advancement and expect younger workers to do same

# Work-life Issues: This is also a key issue for Generation Y

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- They have seen the consequences of imbalance in their parents who:
  - Were downsized
  - Had marital problems/got divorced
  - Where not there for their kids
  - Suffer high stress, burnout, depression and take prescription medicine
- Consequently this group places a high priority on balance which they define much more broadly than the boomers



# Other issue that has increased the importance of addressing this topic

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- Balance not just linked to childcare any more
  - Increasingly balancing work and caregiving will be a huge issue for employers

# Why is eldercare an issue?

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## ■ **Increased life expectancy**

- In 1900 average life expectancy was 47 years of age
- This had increased to 76 years of age by 2000
- Consequence: expansion of the population of older adults

## ■ **Increased labour force participation of women**

- No longer anyone at home to provide the care

## ■ **Fastest growing segment of our population is older Canadians**

- Most rapid population growth is among people 85+ (the fragile elderly) most of whom are women

# Why is eldercare an issue?

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## ■ **Delayed parenting**

- Canadians are waiting until they are in their early 30s to have their first child

## ■ **Lower birth rates**

- Means fewer family care givers to go around

## ■ **Children staying at home longer**

- 2001 Census shows that 58% of 20 to 29 year olds in Canada still live at home!

## ■ **Community supports not there**

- In U.S. over 80% of long term care of elderly dependents is provided on unpaid basis by family members

# Why is eldercare an issue?

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- Policy makers are attempting to reduce the anticipated crisis in healthcare due to an aging population by encouraging family members to care for the elderly in the family home
  - In Canada it has been estimated that to pay people to provide care that at this point in time the family is providing free would cost upwards of \$6 billion per year
- It has been estimated that 75% of those in the sandwich generation are in the workforce
  - Reducing community and health care costs are costing organizations in terms of productivity

# Why is eldercare an issue?

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- Because this is a relatively new phenomena, all players are confused about what their role should be
  - Those in the “middle” feel guilt and uncertainty about level of care
  - People feel reluctant to pay someone else to care for their parents
  - Employers do not appreciate the extent to which this issue can cause problems for employees

# Caregiving trends

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- Data would suggest that this is not a short term phenomena
- Why?
  - Longevity increasing
  - The number of “fragile” elderly increasing
  - Family size decreasing
  - Increasing number of working caregivers
  - Increase in male caregivers
  - Increase in long distance caregivers

# Main predictor of caregiver strain?

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- Having parent (s) or in-law(s) who are:
  - 75 or older
  - 65 or older
- Gender not as important a predictor as we anticipated

# What can be done to reduce work-life conflict?

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- Three partners here:
  - Employers
  - Employees
  - Families

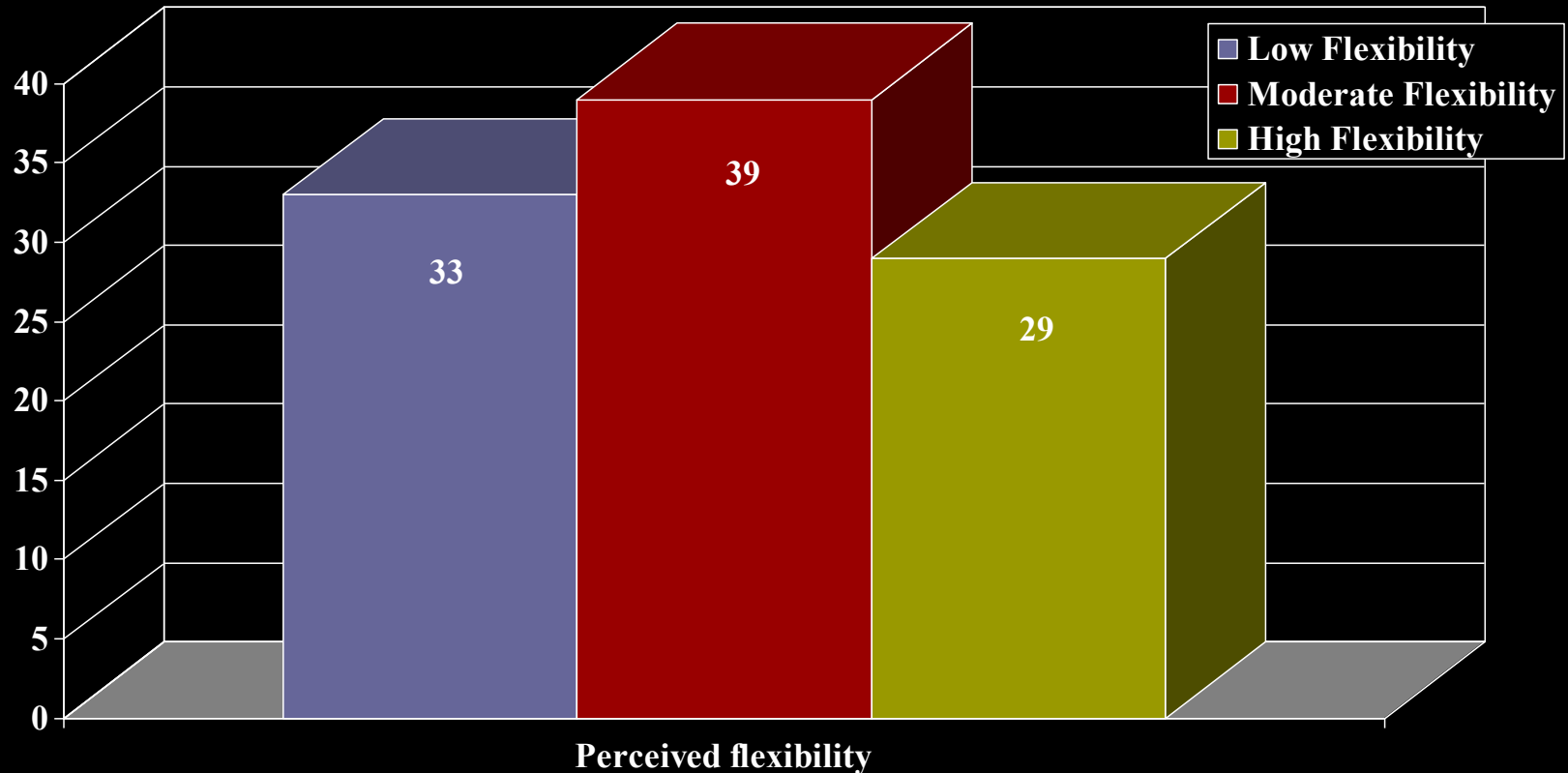


# What can employers do?

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- Following strategies examined in our study:
  - Flexible work arrangements
  - Give employees more control of their work hours and work schedules (i.e. increase perceived flexibility)
  - Develop and support good management
  - Supportive policies and practices

# While some Canadians perceive they have control over their work schedule the majority do not



# Examination of the flexibility data indicate following: % with high flexibility

Activity	% high
Take paid day off when child is sick	54%
Have meals with family	51%
Take holidays when want	51%
Interrupt work day to deal with personal issues and return	50%
Vary work hours	46%
Take paid day off to care for elderly dependent	44%
Arrange work schedule to meet personal commitments	38%
Take time off to attend course	32%
Telework	16%

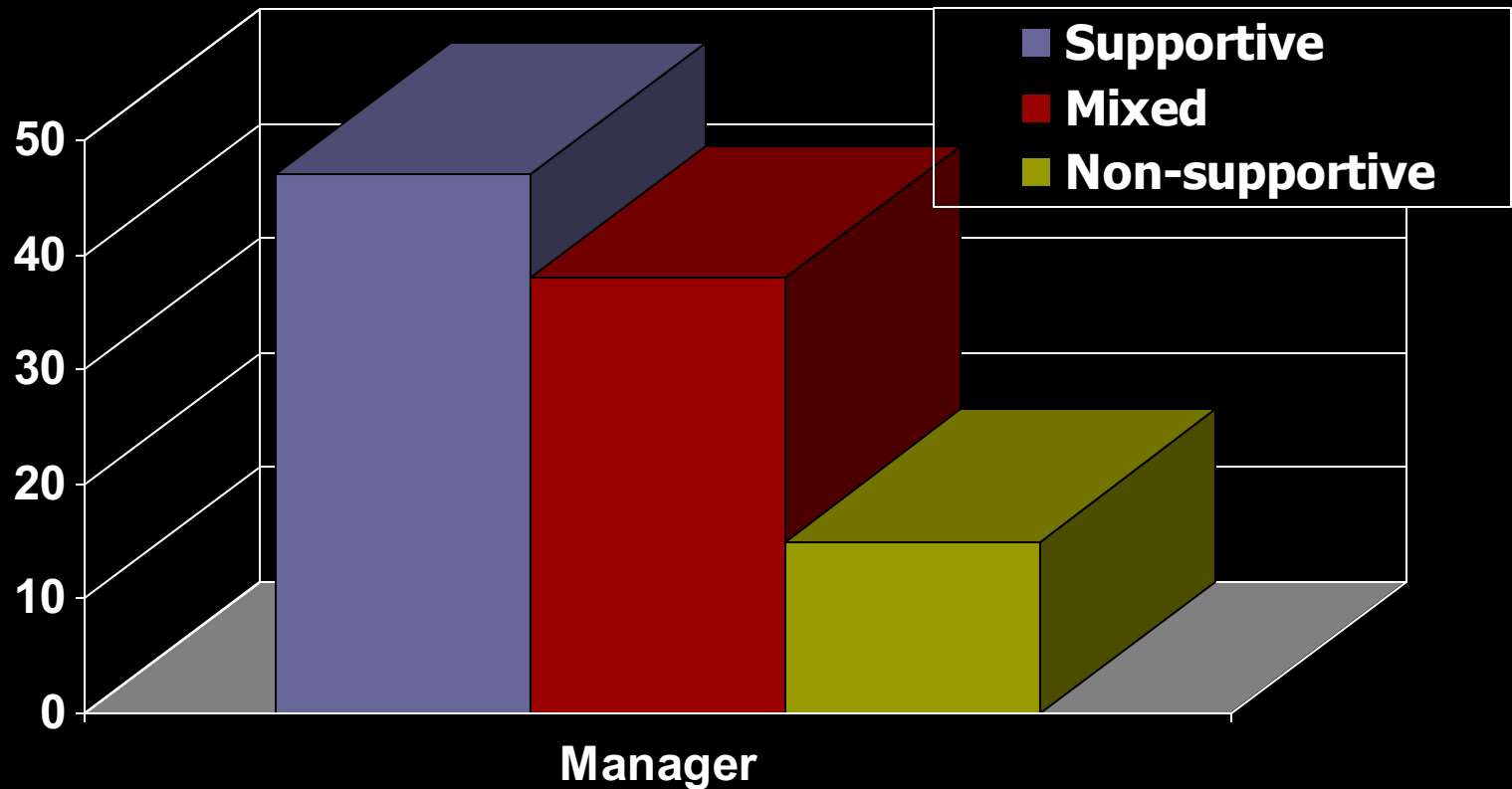
# Conclusions: Flexibility

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- A lot of inequity with respect to perceived flexibility
- While many organizations recognize issues with respect to childcare, less has been done with respect to:
  - Dealing with older children
  - Eldercare
- Many organizations still operate under “myth of separate worlds
- Many organizations not addressing needs of younger workers
  - No telework
  - No time off for training and development

# Our data suggests that less than half of Canadian employees perceive that their manager is supportive

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# Most Canadian organizations download costs of dealing with this issue to employees: best practice benefits are rare

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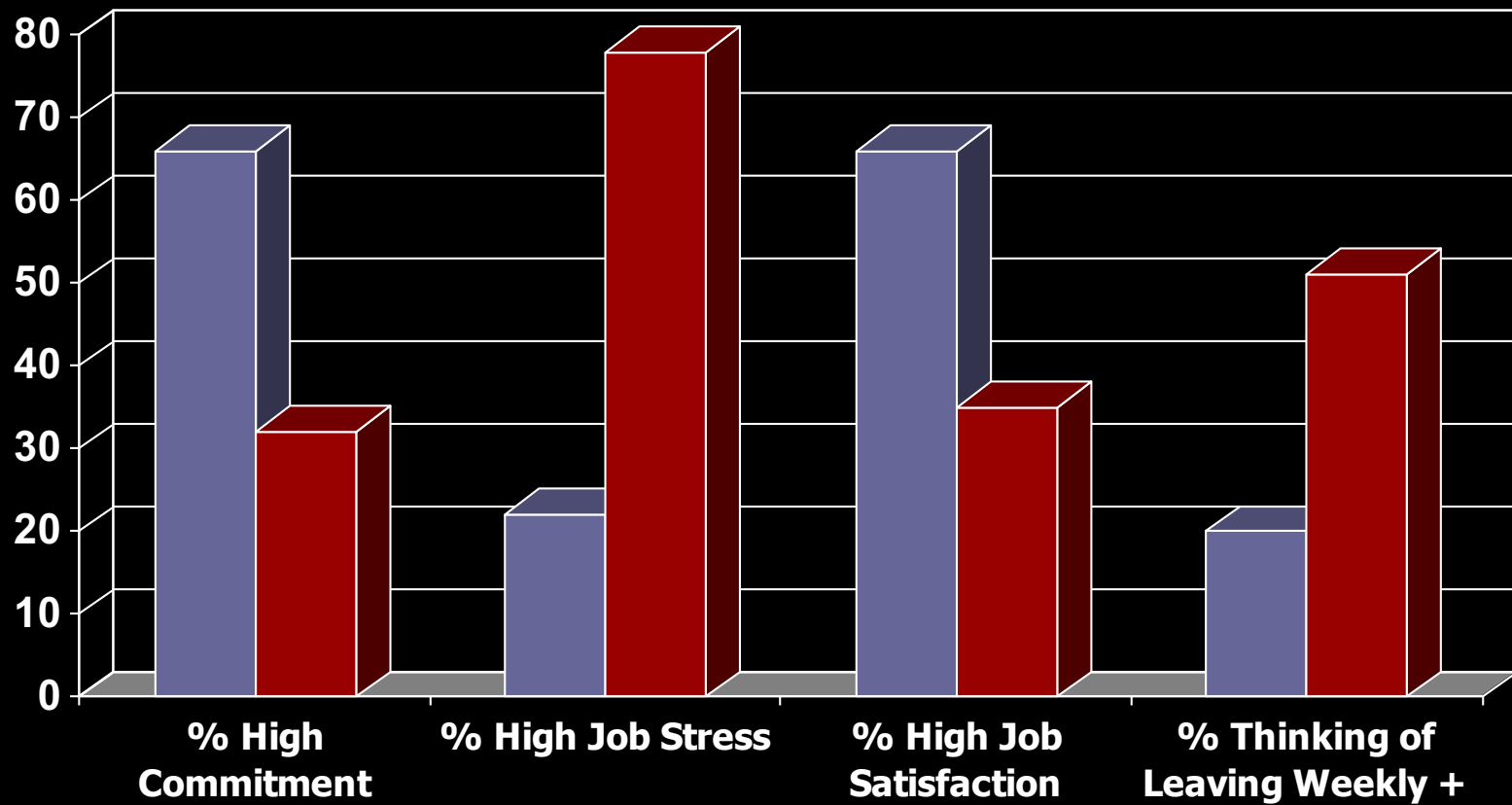
EAP	83%
Unpaid LOA	83%
Emergency day off	75%
Time off vs Overtime	75%
Short term personal leave	66%
Flexible hours	50%
Pro-rated part time	45%
Personal day off – pay	40%
Telework	20%
Child care referral	8%
On site day care	7%
Eldercare referral	6%

# Which of these strategies work?

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- Perceived flexibility key to reducing role overload and work interferes with family
  - Two forms of flexibility particularly important:
    - Ability to arrange ones work schedule to meet personal or family commitments
    - Ability to interrupt ones work day to deal with a personal or family matter and then return to work

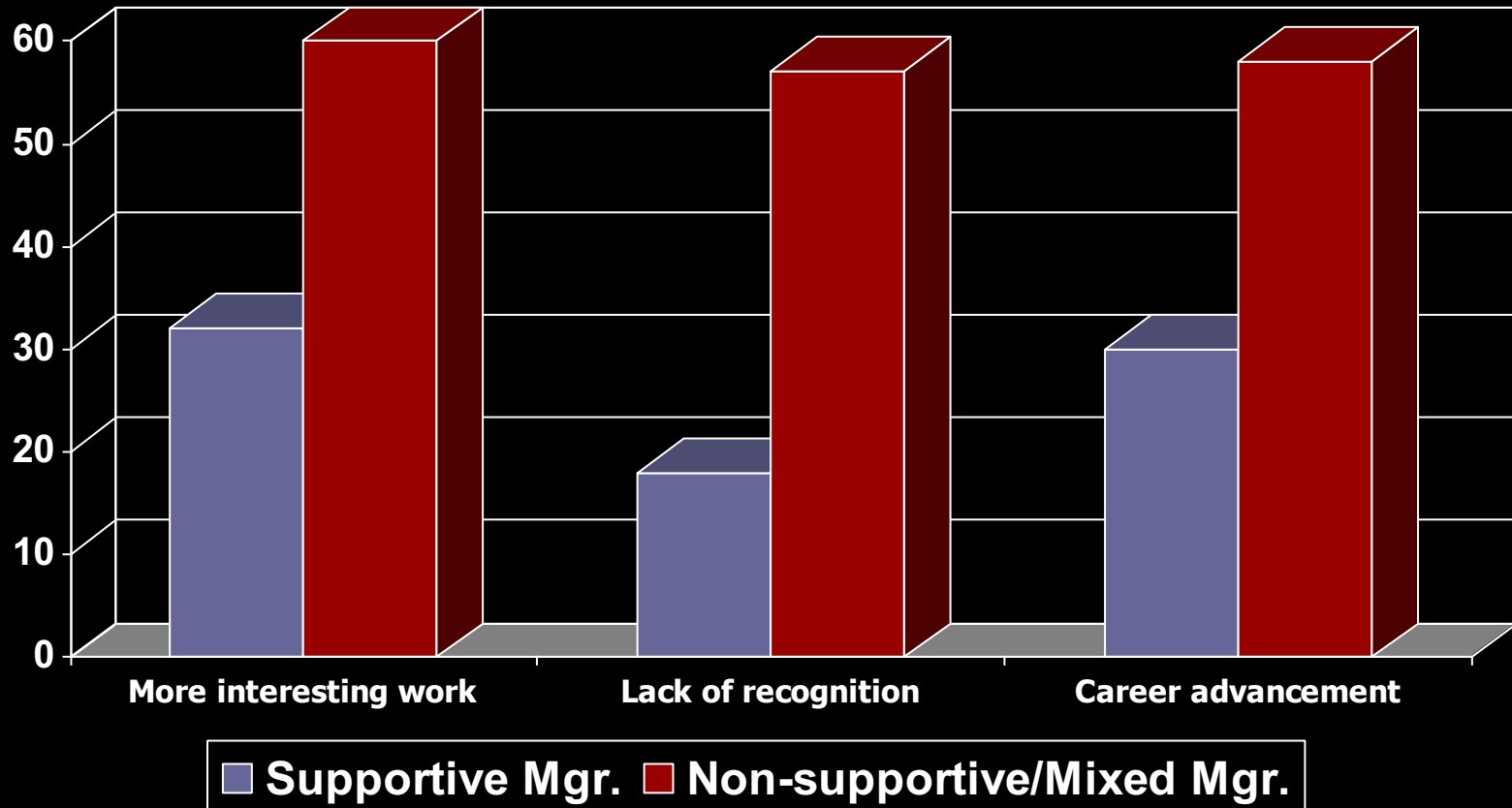
# Impact of Management Behaviour On: Key Work Organizational Outcomes



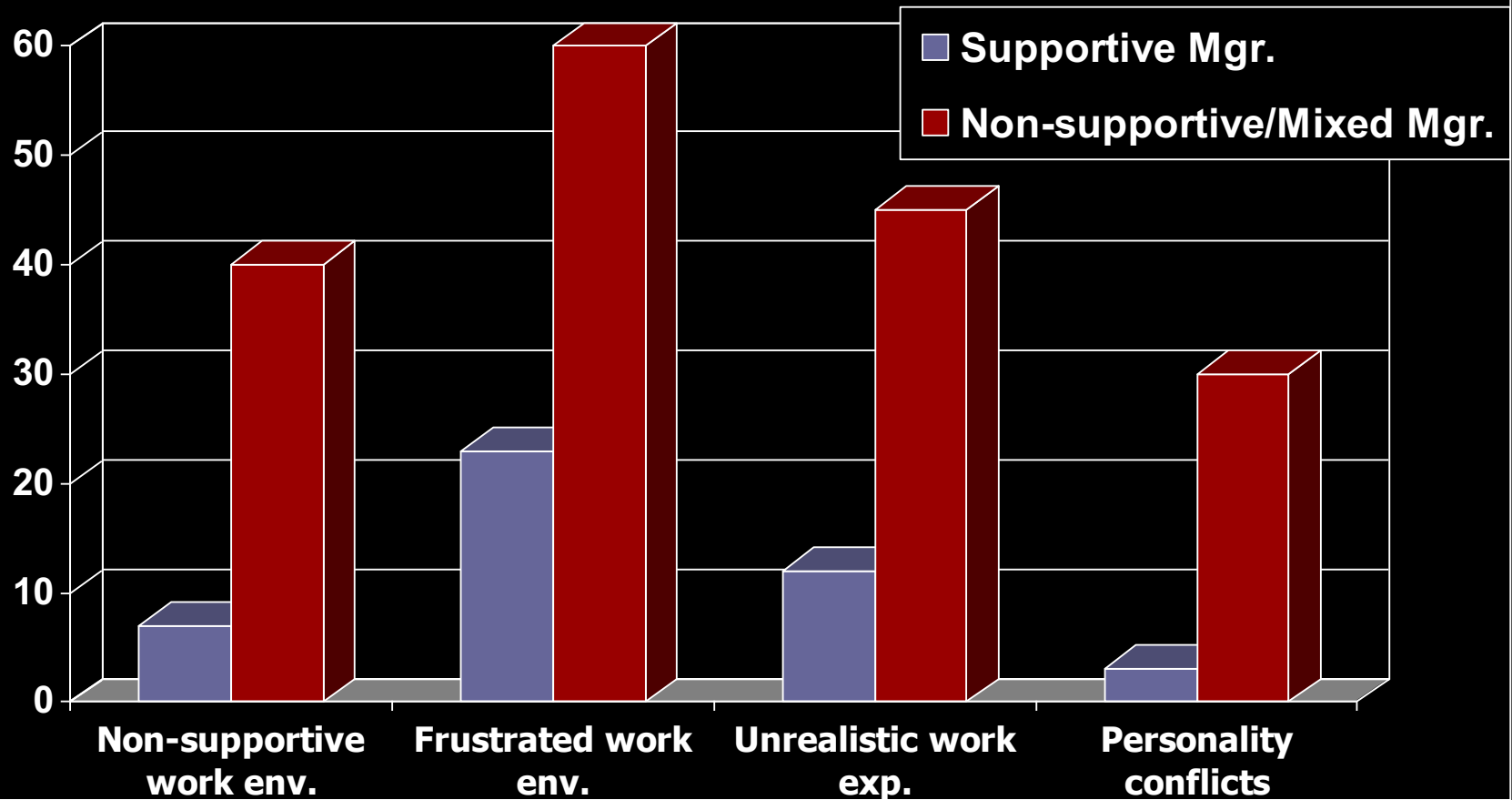
■ Supportive Mgr. ■ Non-Supportive/Mixed Mgr.



# Impact of Management Behavior On: Why People Leave



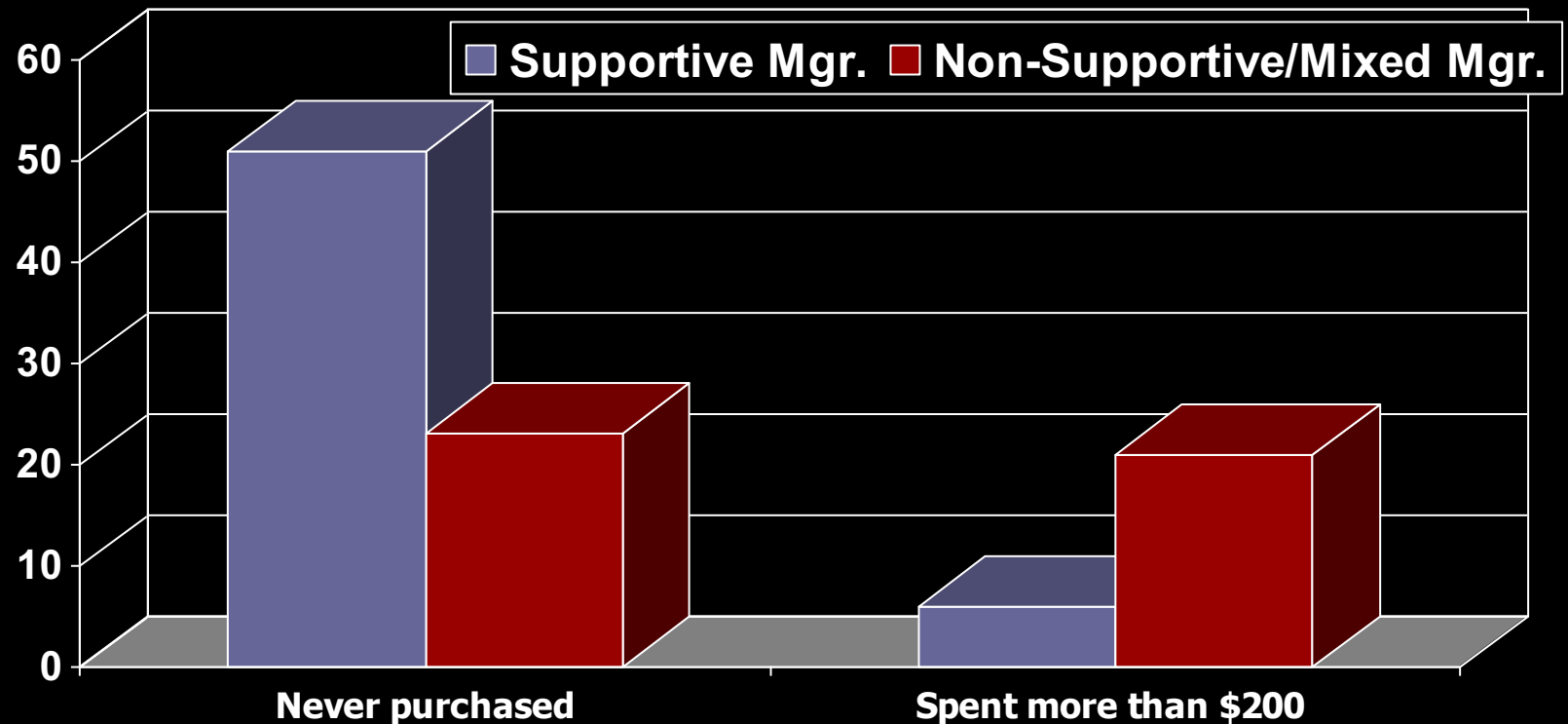
# Impact of Management Behavior On: Why People Leave



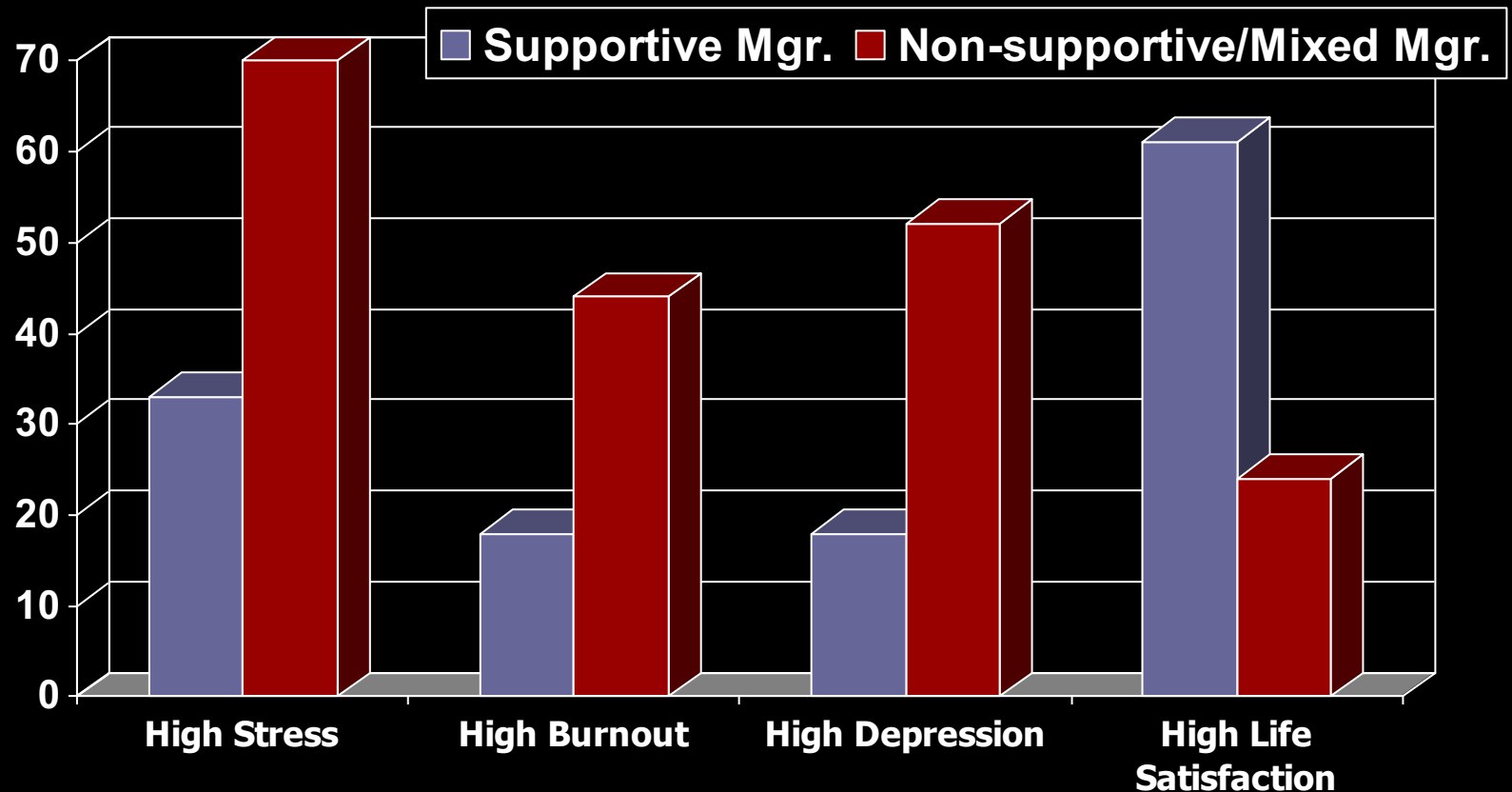
# Impact of Management Behaviour On: Spending on Prescription Medicine

In past six months, percent of employees have:

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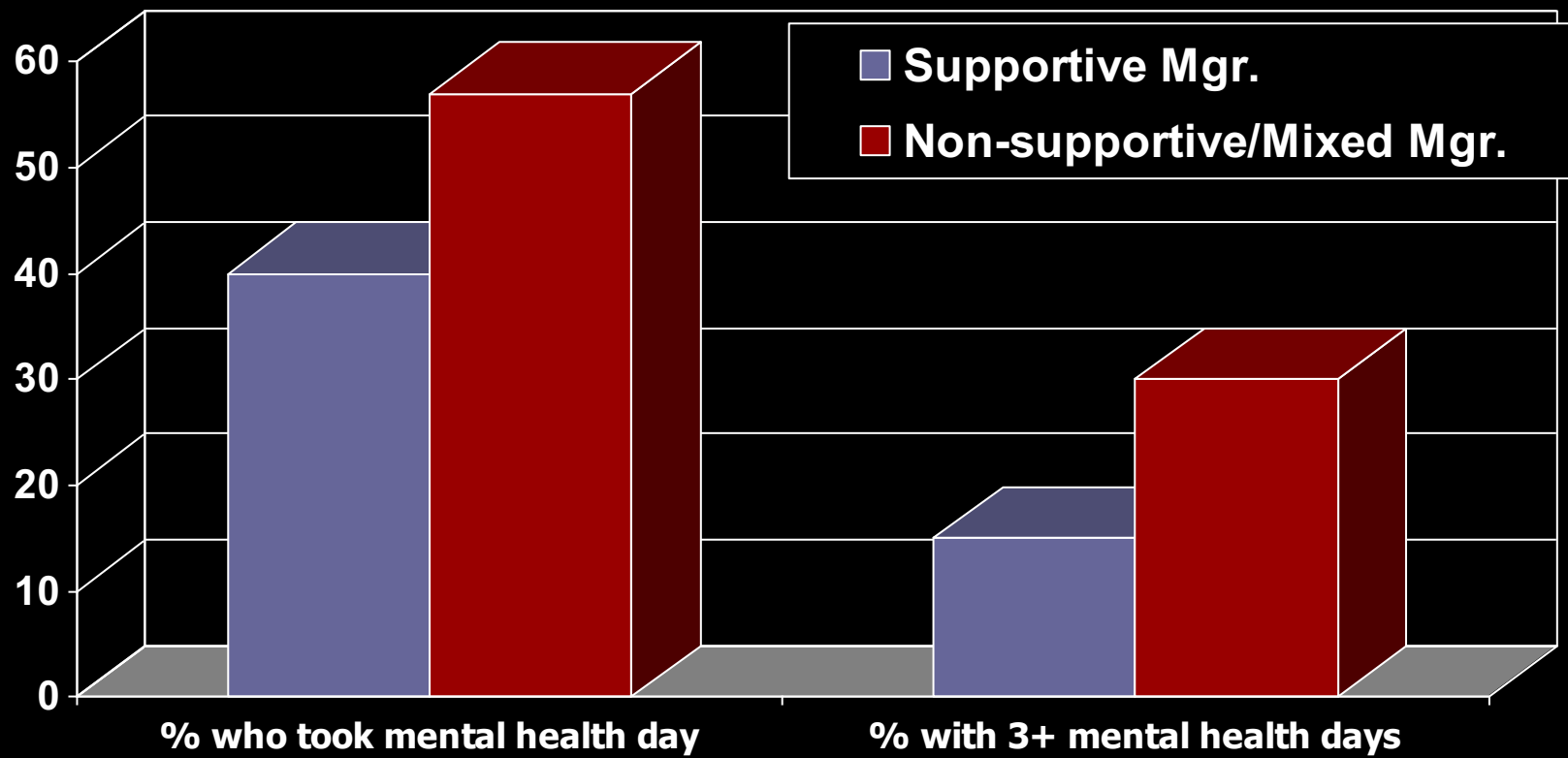


# Impact of Management Behaviour On: Employee Mental Health

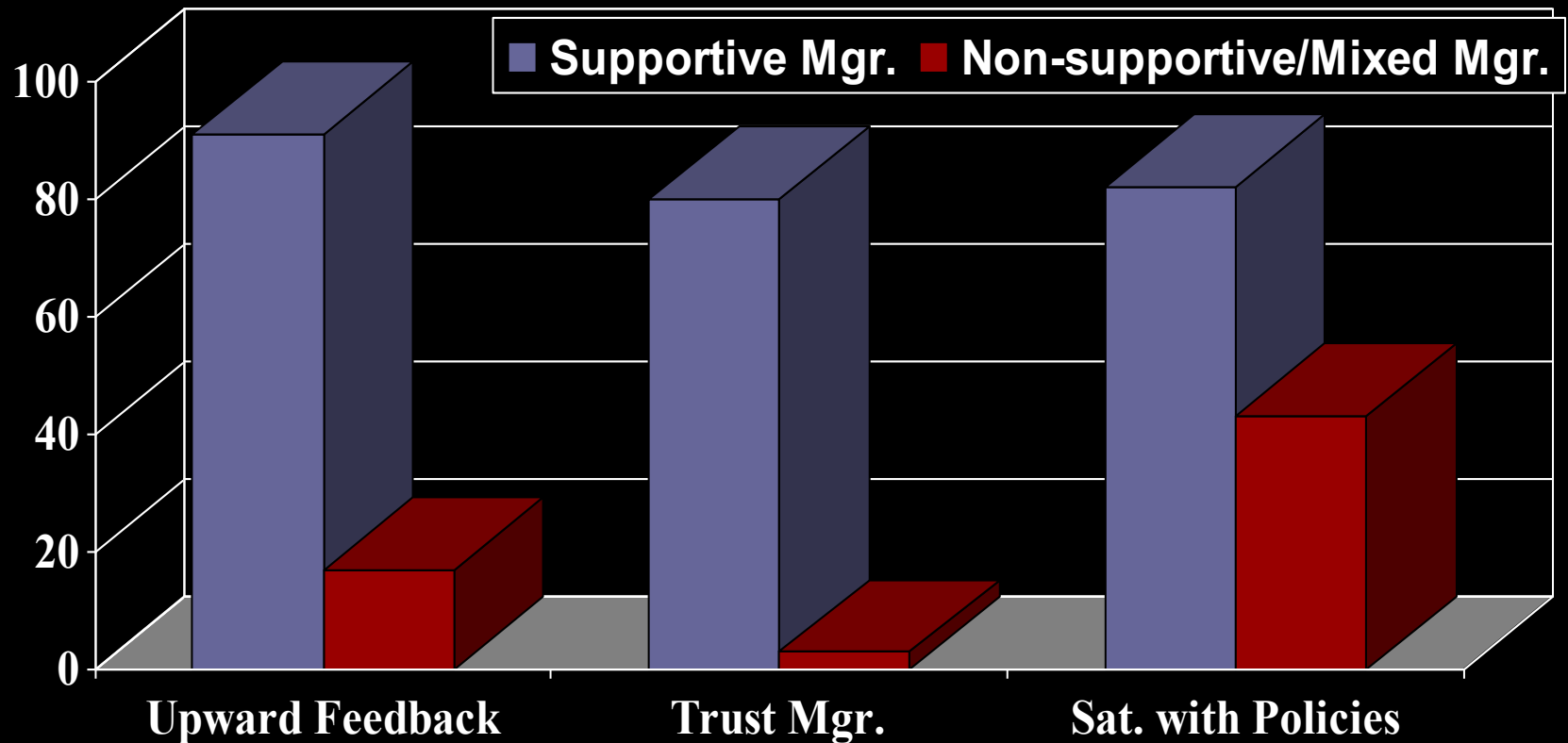


# Impact of Management Behaviour On: Absenteeism Due to Mental/Physical Fatigue

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# Impact of Management Behaviour On: Ability to Manage Change



# Being “best practice” in terms of policies makes little difference

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- The work arrangement the employee uses has little impact on role overload or work interferes with family
- None of the benefits examined in this study are associated with reduced levels of these two forms of work-life conflict

# Being “best practice” in terms of policies makes little difference

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## ■ Implications:

- companies who implement flexible work arrangements or introduce family friendly benefit packages will not see a reduction in work-life conflict if they do not address issues associated with use of these policies and benefits



# Recommendations: To reduce role overload and work interferes with family employers need to:

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- Increase the number of supportive managers within the organization
- They can do this by identifying why managers are not supportive
- Competing explanations from our data include:
  - Don't know how
  - Don't have time
    - Managers themselves are overloaded
    - Good people management needs time
  - Aren't motivated
    - Not rewarded for being supportive (in fact, often rewarded for being non-supportive)
    - Prefer (and are more comfortable with) the operational piece of the job
  - Culture does not support good management

# Recommendations: To reduce role overload and work interferes with family employers need to:

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- They can increase number of supportive managers by giving managers at all levels:
  - *the skills* they need to manage the “people” part of their job
  - *the tools* they need to manage people
  - *the time* they need to manage this part of their job
  - *The incentives* to focus on the “people part” of their jobs (i.e., measurement and accountability around the people piece of the job, 360 feedback, rewards focused on recognition of good people skills)

Recommendations: To reduce role overload and work interferes with family employees need to:

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- Reduce the use of the following coping strategies:
  - “working harder and trying to do it all”
  - “reducing the quality of things that they do”
  - “just try and forget about it”
- Employees need to educate themselves on how to deal effectively with work life conflict
  - Prioritizing and delegating does help

# Recommendations: To reduce role overload and work interferes with family employees need to:

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- Get enough sleep each night
- Maintain a healthy social life
- Maintain personal standards at home
- Make a real effort to keep work and family domains separate
  - Mentally and physically
- Modify work schedule as necessary to manage demands at home
- Cover family responsibilities for each other

# Ways forward

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- Both employees and employers are at a cross roads with respect to this issue
  - Seller's market for labour means that employers cannot continue to ignore these issues
  - Physical and mental health data suggest that employees also cannot continue to “burn the candle at both ends”
- There is no “they” – and there is no time like the present

# Closing Thoughts: Why Focus on People? (continued...)

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"Little of today's technology is proprietary. Technology is easily obtained and replicated and only levels the playing field. An organization's valued human assets cannot be copied."

*Bill*

# Final Words

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**“More than anytime in history mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness, the other to extinction. Let us pray that we have the wisdom to choose correctly.”**

*Woody Allen*