

Demanding Work.

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The meaning of “job quality”

- Economics tradition: subjective and individualistic in theory, but distrustful of subjective evidence; emphasis on pay and compensating differentials
- Sociological tradition: autonomy and use of skill
- Psychological tradition: job satisfaction and dissatisfaction

- Application of Sen's capabilities approach implies that "job quality":
 - should be needs based
 - involves multiple facets, with no universal means of relative valuation
- combined with the practical possibilities of modern survey enquiry methods, suggests that key concepts to measure are:
 - Pay
 - Skills
 - Effort (extensive and intensive)
 - Risk
 - Autonomy
 - Working conditions

Why effort?

Some effort is satisfying, but

- work overload known to be negatively correlated with job satisfaction, and measures of worker well-being
- Sense of malaise/ reports of rising stress: part of the paradox of job quality in the affluent society

Today

- the processes of work intensification
- up-to-date trends in work effort in Britain
- some evidence about effort and technological change
- if time: some other trends uncovered by our surveys

Twin Processes:

- Skill-biased technological change
 - link with “knowledge society” paradigm
- Effort-biased technological change (EBTC)

Effort-biased Technical Change: some examples

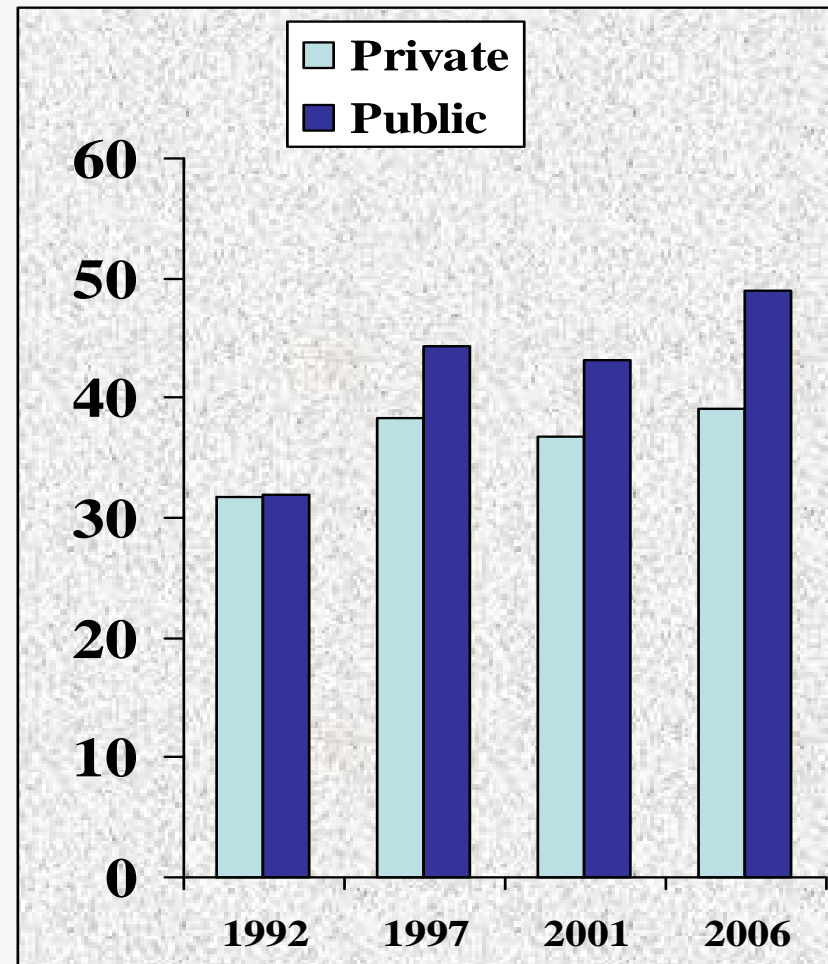
- “The eradication of leisure” in jeans manufacturing
- the call centre
- mobiles and emails
- flexible productions systems & multi-skilling
- flexible rostering

Empirical methods

- Preferred method: comparisons using successive surveys; where possible use multiple data series
- Key sources of data:
 - The UK Skills Surveys 1997, 2001 and 2006; Employment in Britain 1992
 - All random probability surveys; reasonable response rates; face-to-face; at home
 - Target sample: those in employment aged 20-60

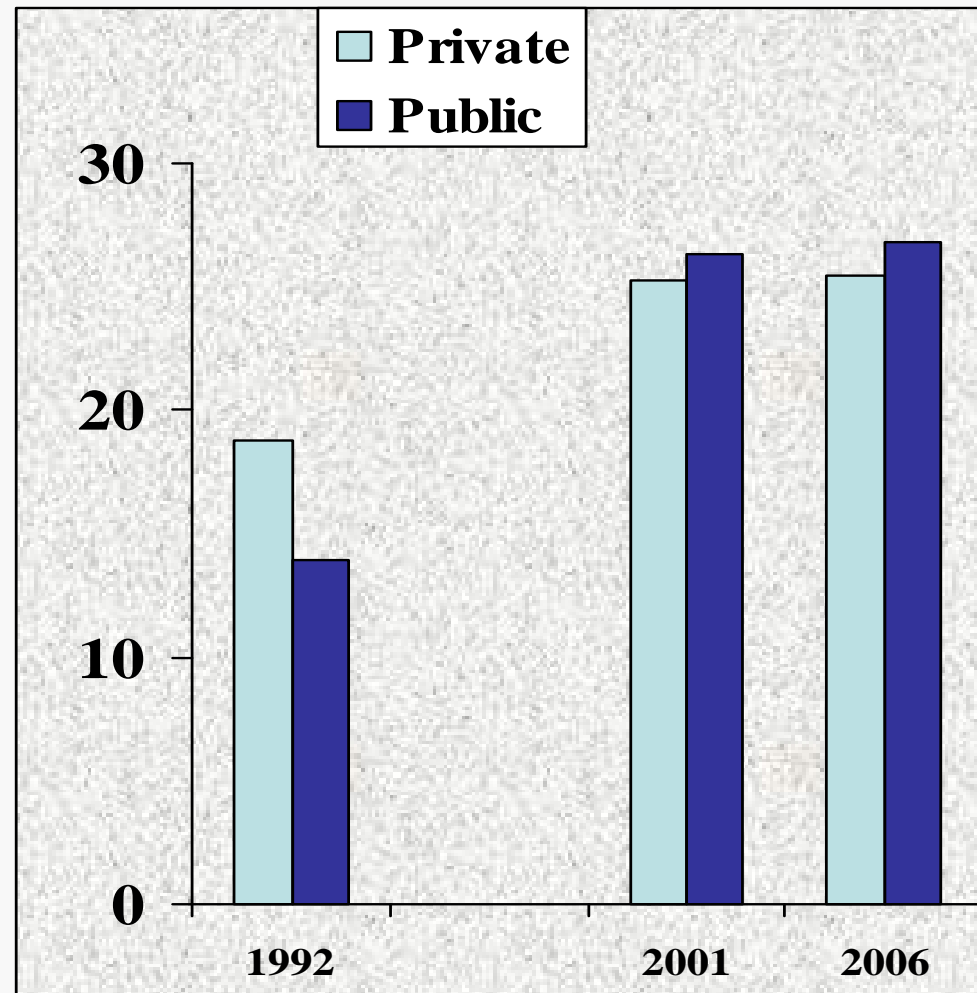
Work Intensification 1

- The proportion of workers in Britain who **strongly agree** that: “My job requires that I work very hard”



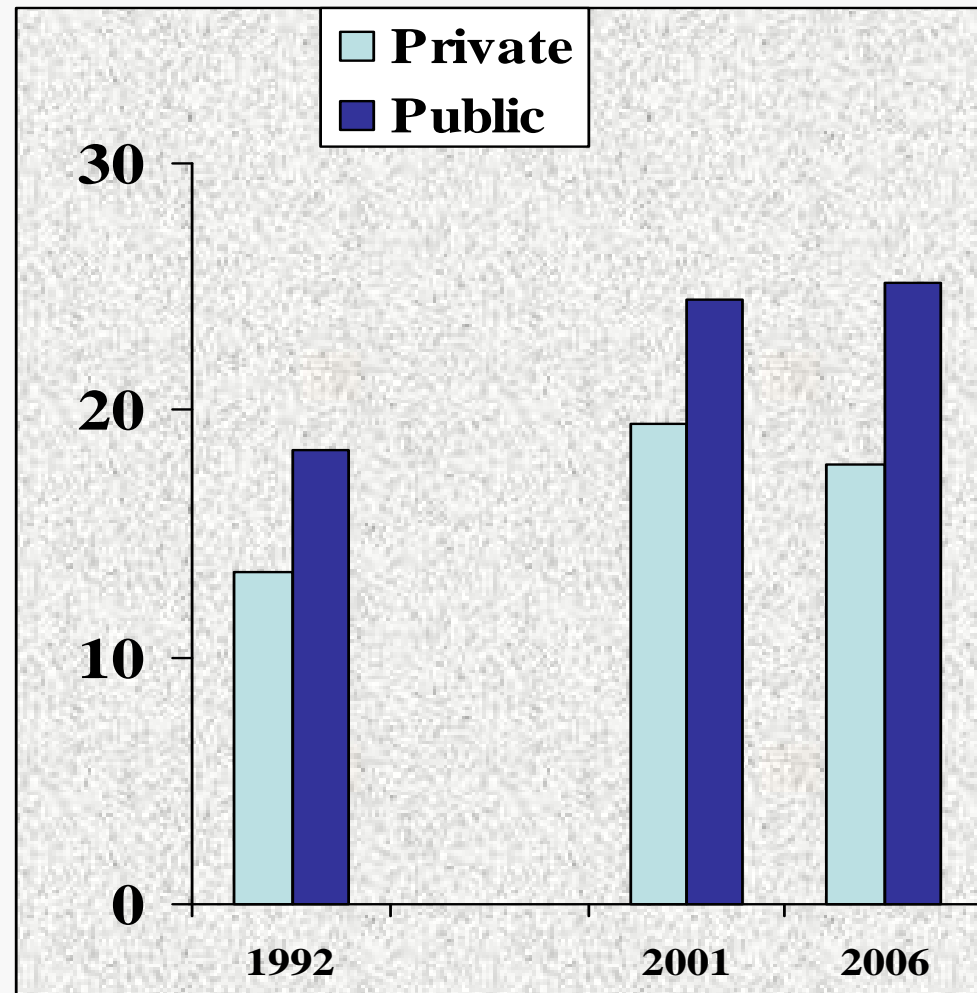
Work Intensification 2

- The proportion of workers in Britain who “work at very high speed” **all or most of the time.**



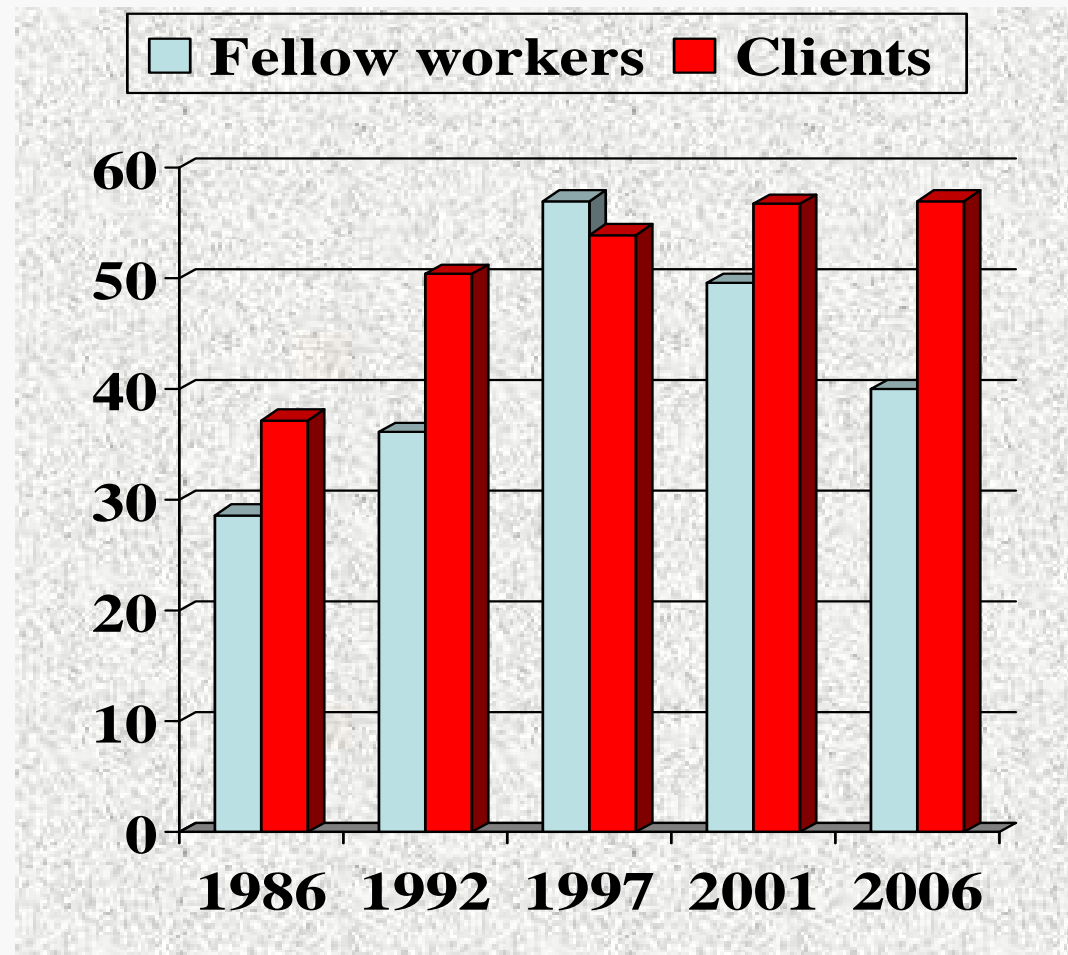
Work Intensification 3

- The proportion of workers in Britain who “work under a great deal of tension” (**strong agreement**)

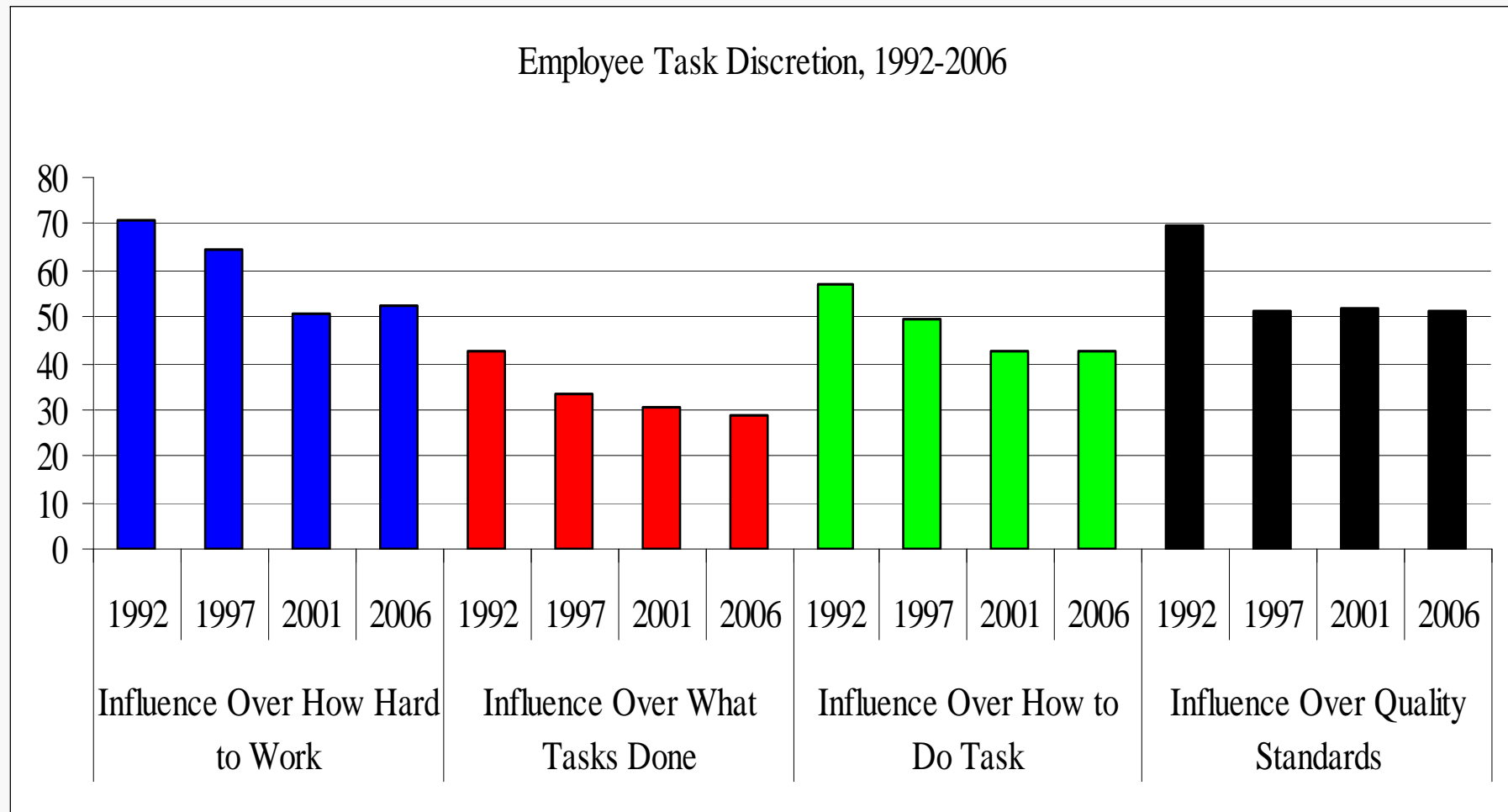


Work Pressure Sources

- % of employees feeling pressure to work hard from **fellow workers or colleagues,** and from **clients or customers**



‘How much influence do *you personally* have: on how hard you work; deciding what tasks you are to do; deciding how you are to do the task; deciding the quality standards to which you work?
-- % with a “great deal” of influence



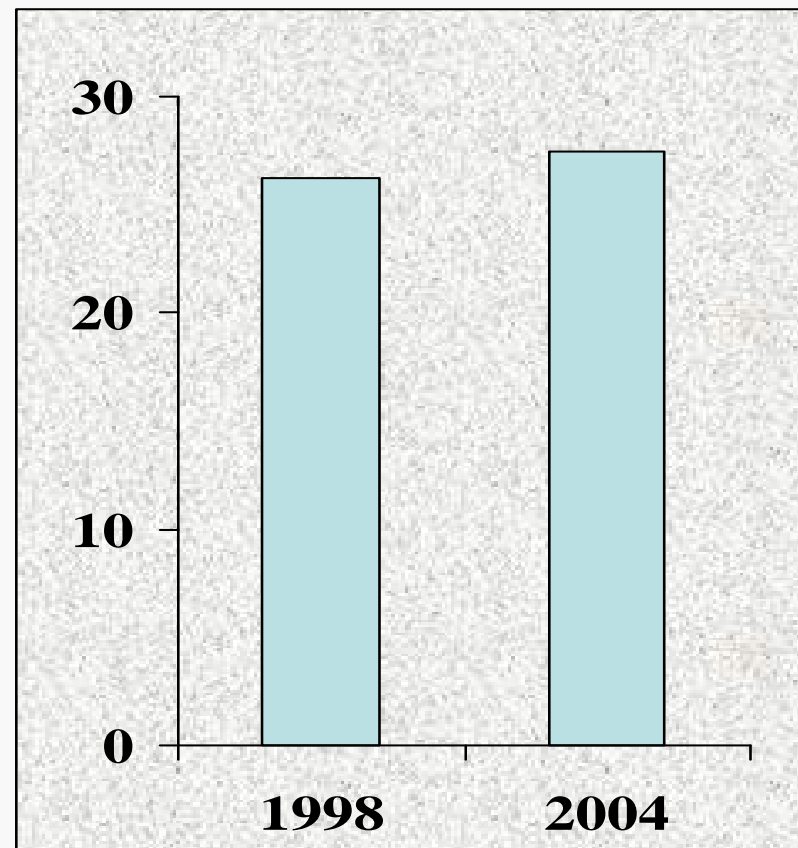
Other Data Sources

- WERS
- European Survey of Living and Working and Conditions, 1991, 1995, 2000, 2005
- DG Employment

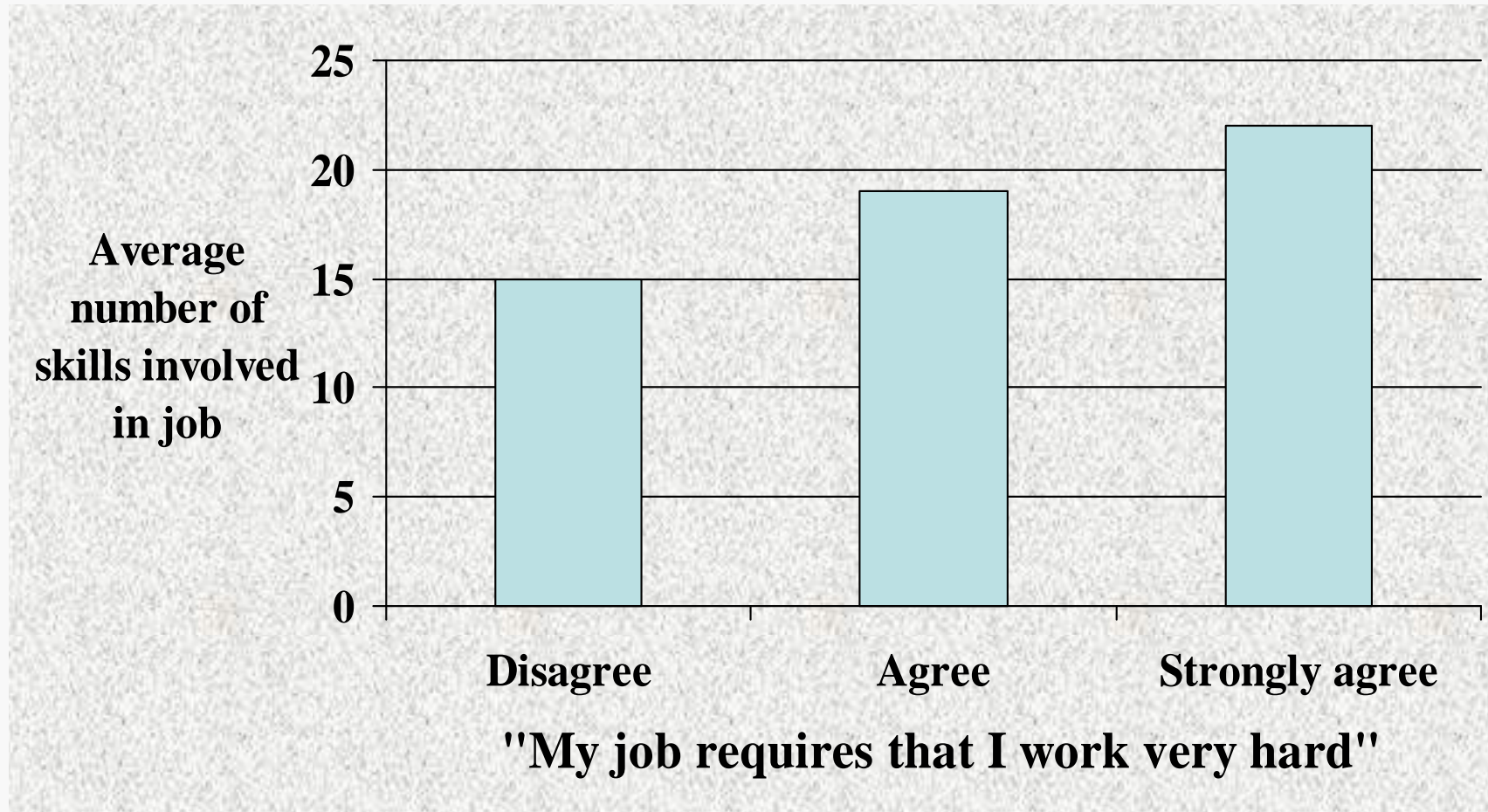
All the same story, with respect to Britain.

Work Intensification 1, acc to WERS

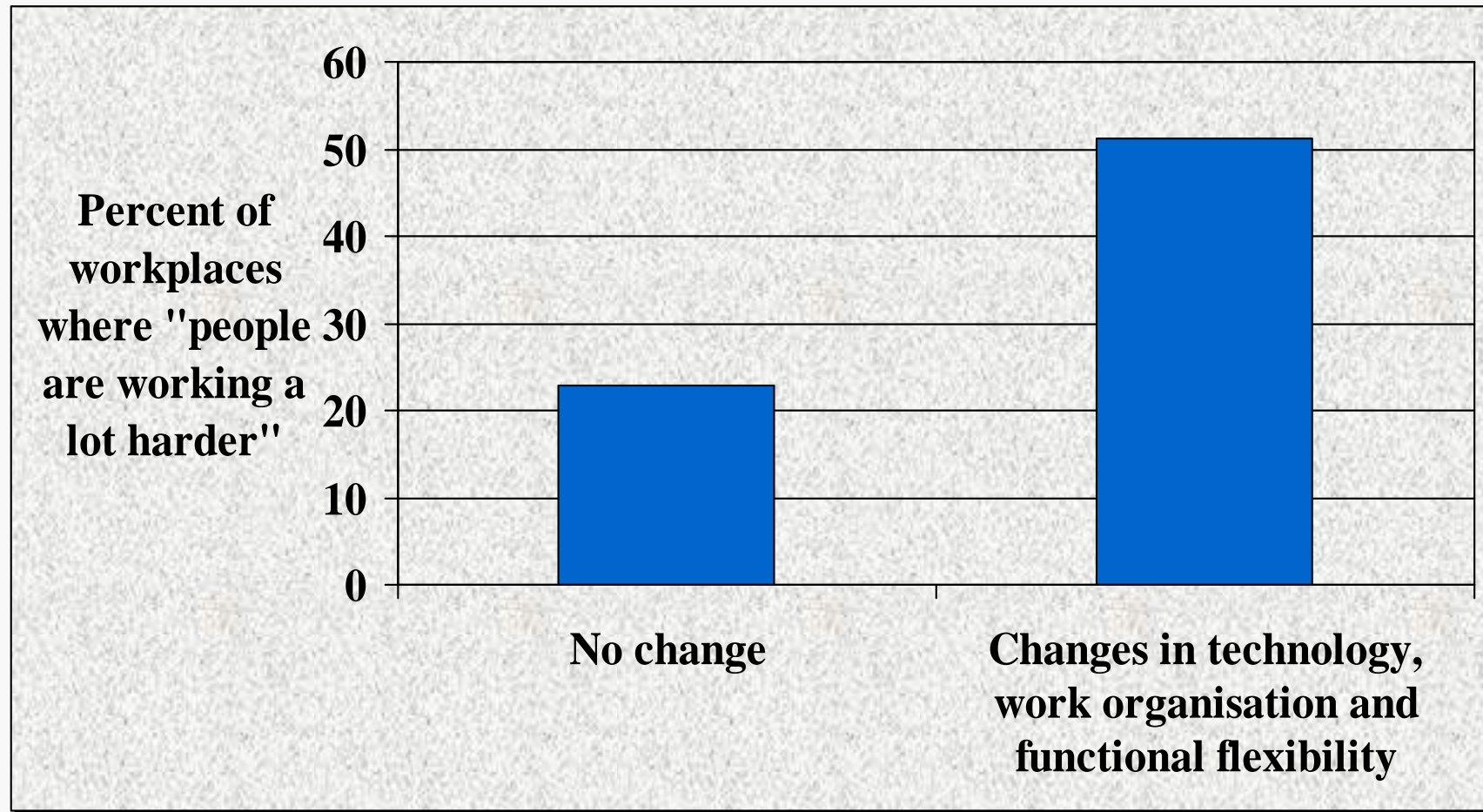
- The proportion of workers in Britain who strongly agree that: “My job requires that I work very hard”



Work Intensity and Multi-Skilling



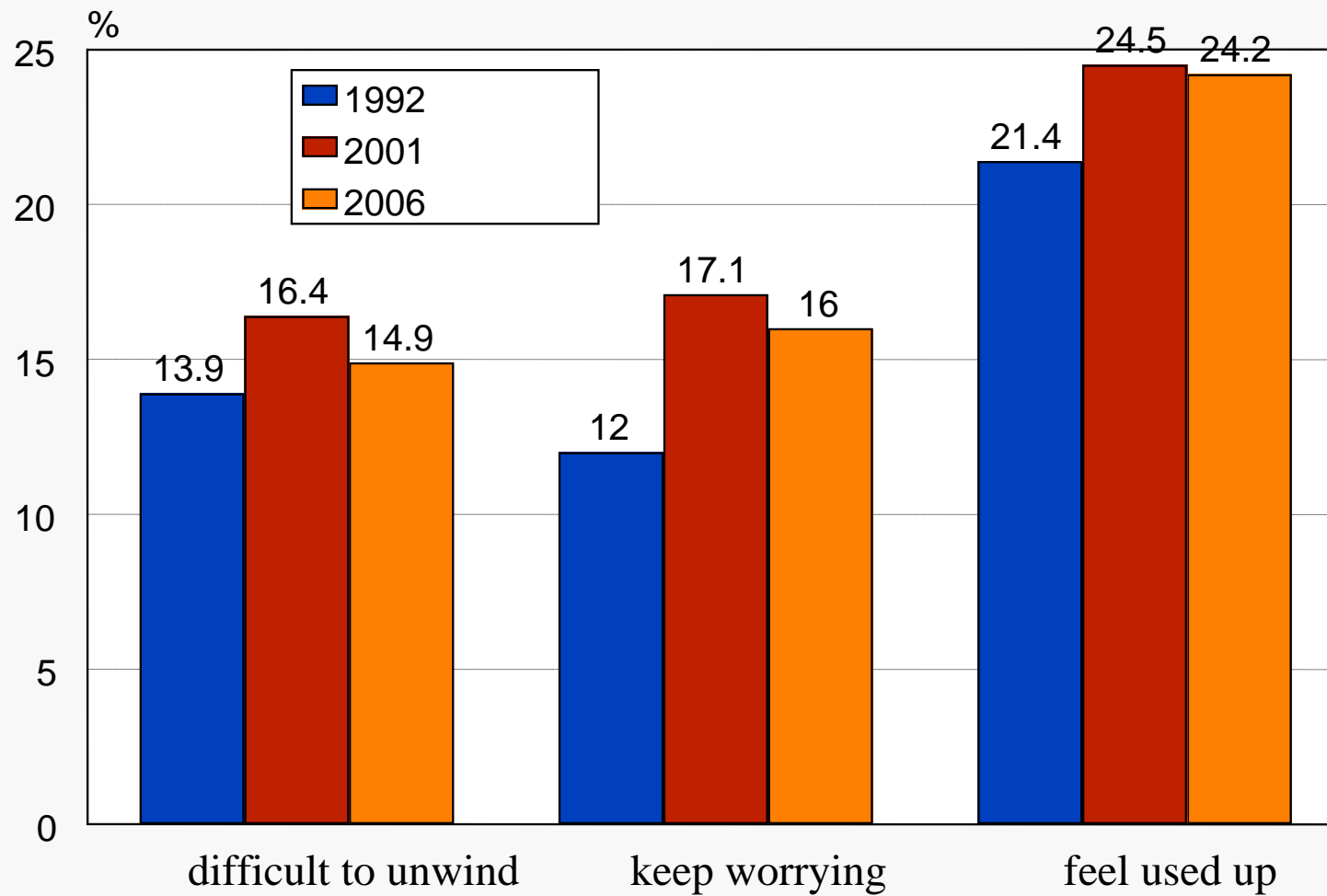
Work Intensification and Technological Change



EBTC not the only factor

- fiscal squeeze, and work in the state sector, allied to workers' commitment
- high-commitment management practices?
 - small establishments only
- declines in union power?
- “Big brother” -- perhaps
- Trade?
 - Not directly
- Consumerism? – conceivably
- Insecurity? -- unlikely

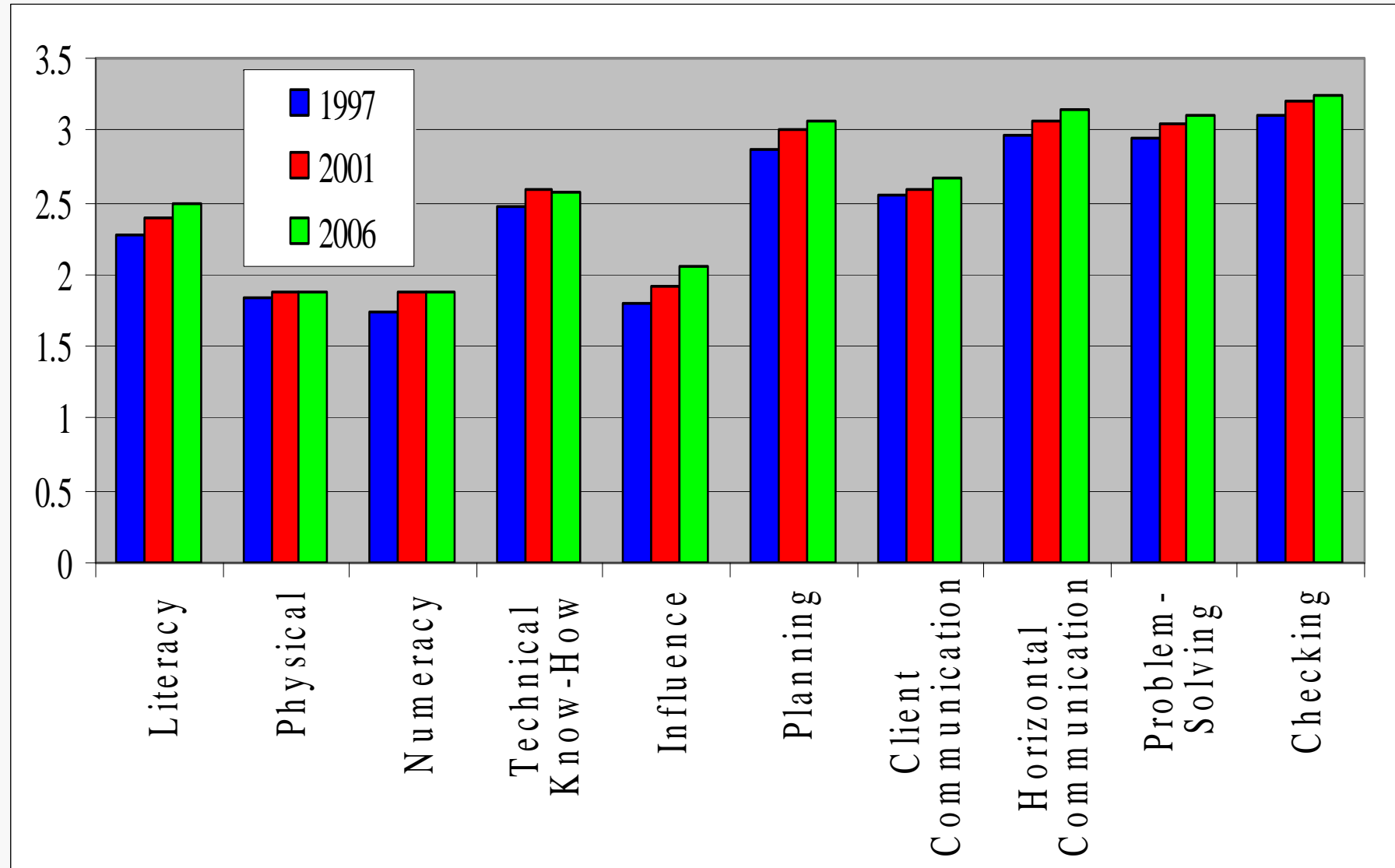
Work Strain 1992-2006



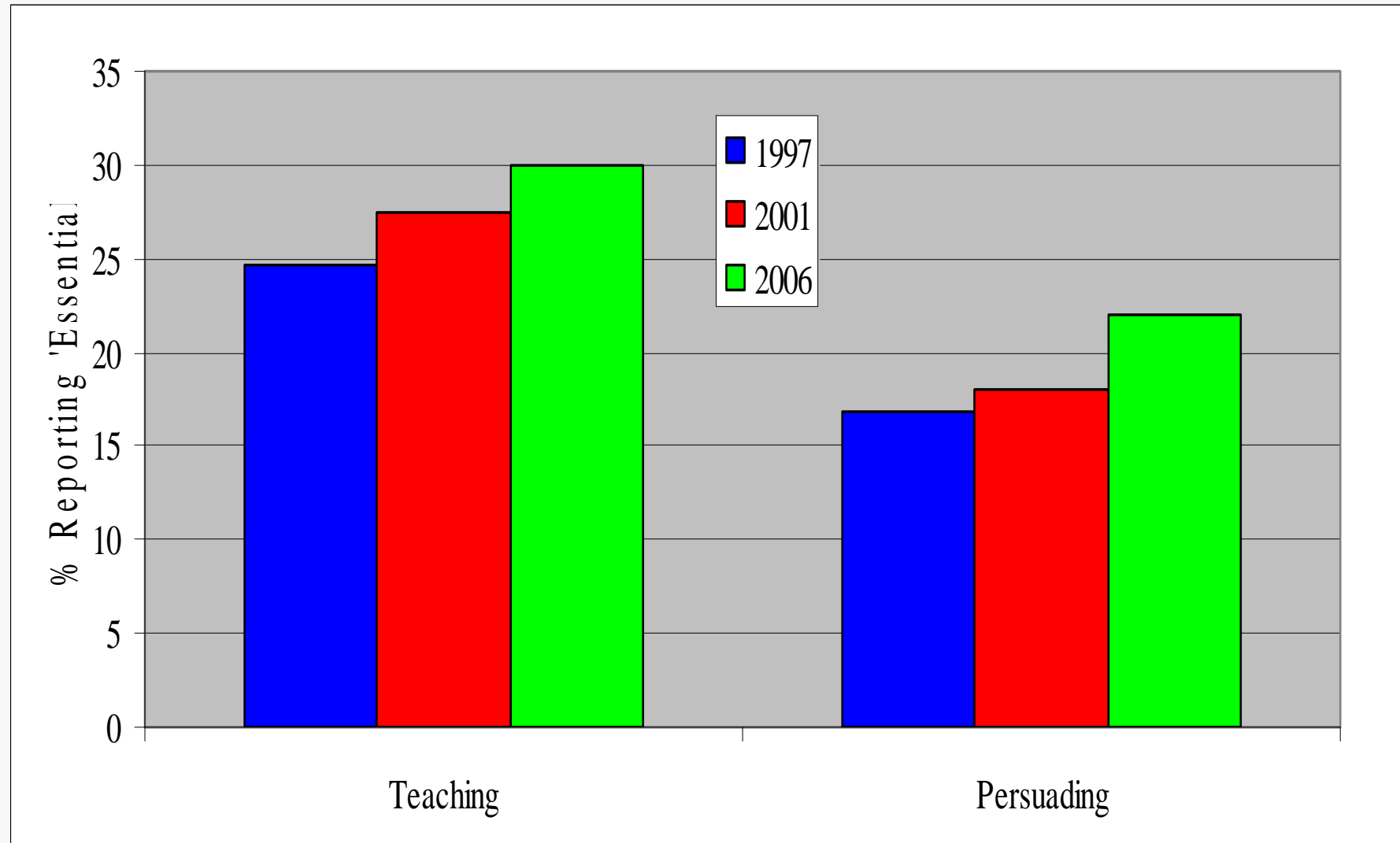
Limits to work intensification

- human frame
- resistance
 - individual
 - downshifting
 - learning
 - firm-level
 - stress management
 - unions
 - social
 - EU Directives; right to request flexible working etc.

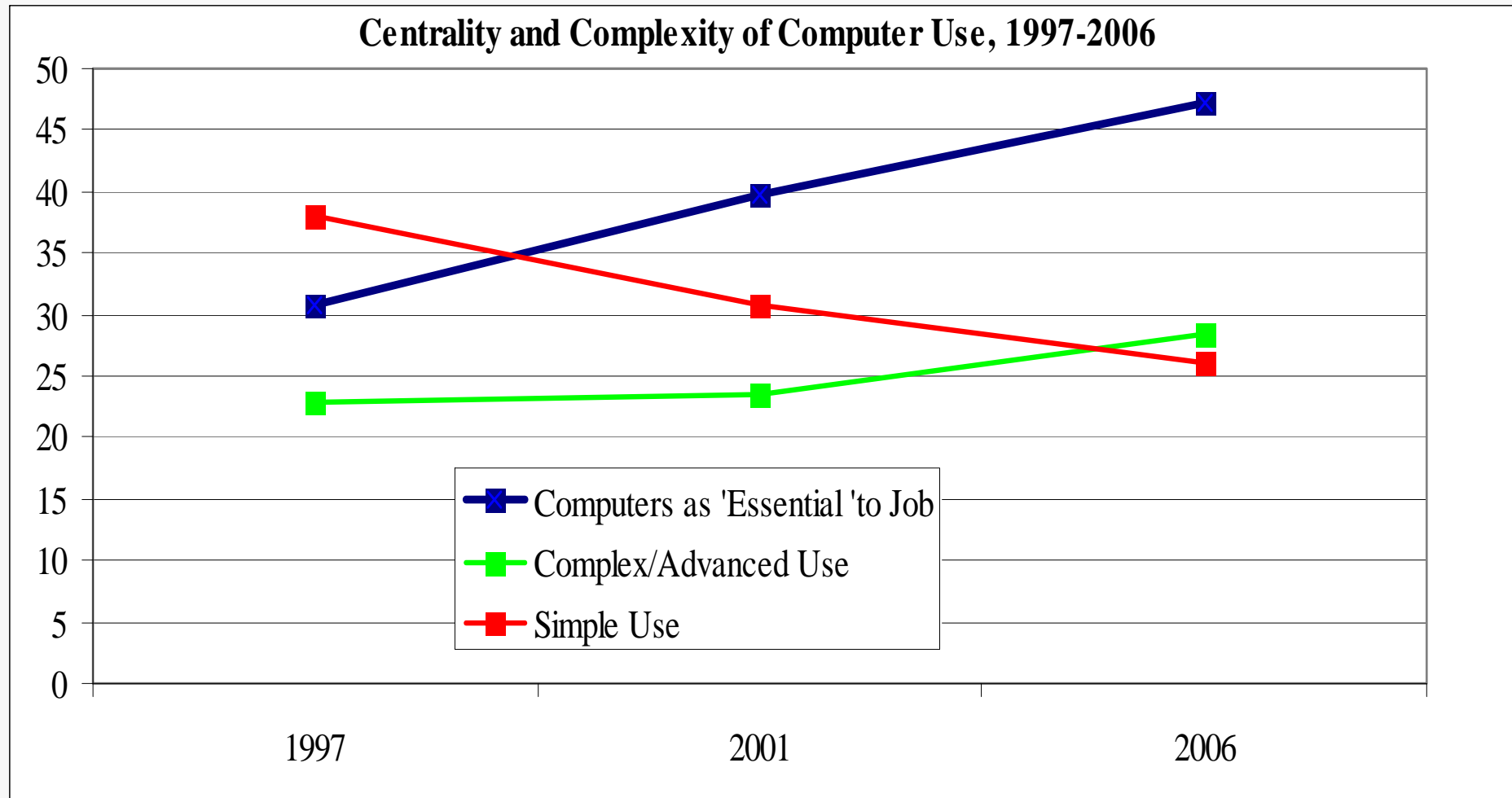
Generic Skills on the Rise



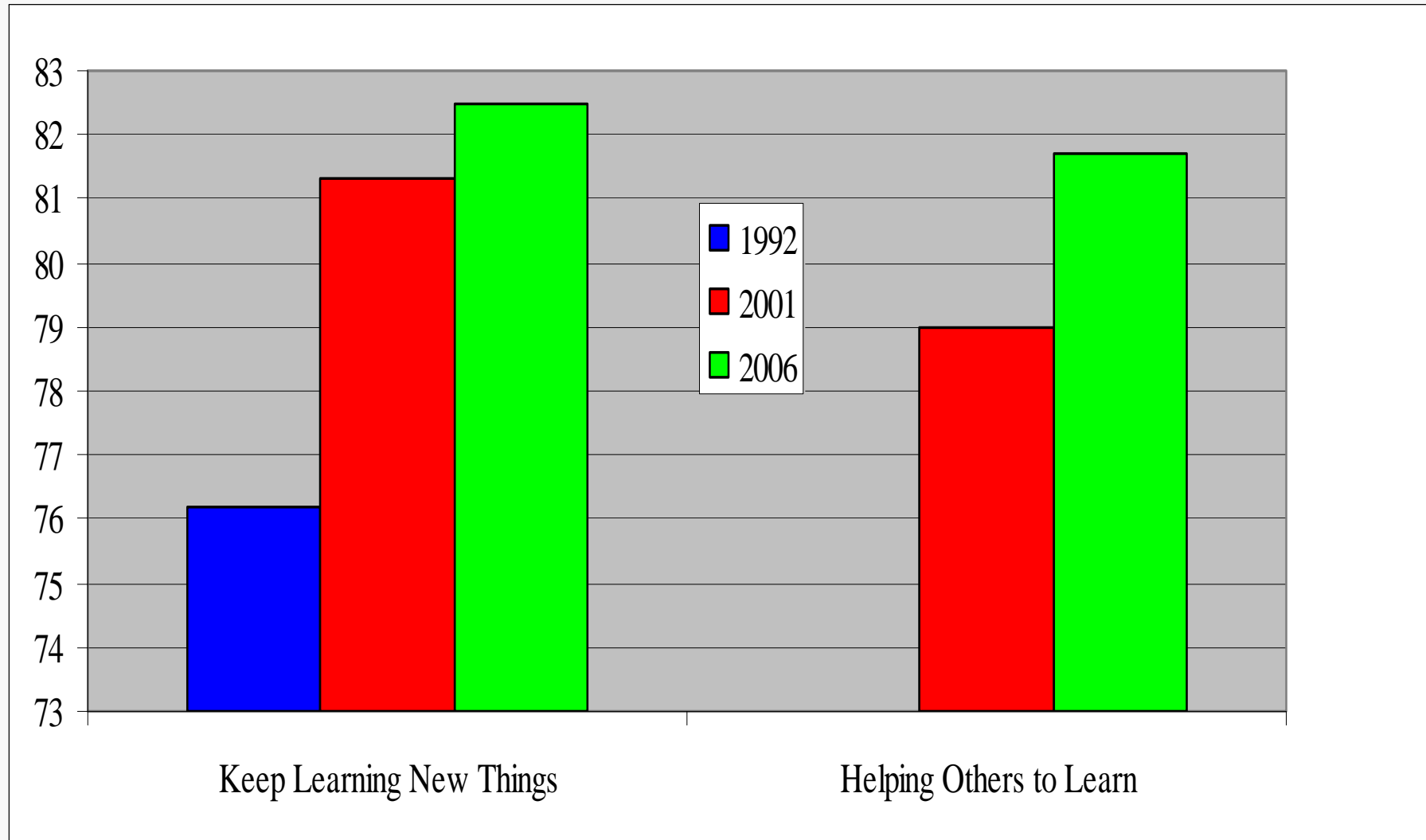
Especially – ‘Influence’ & Computing



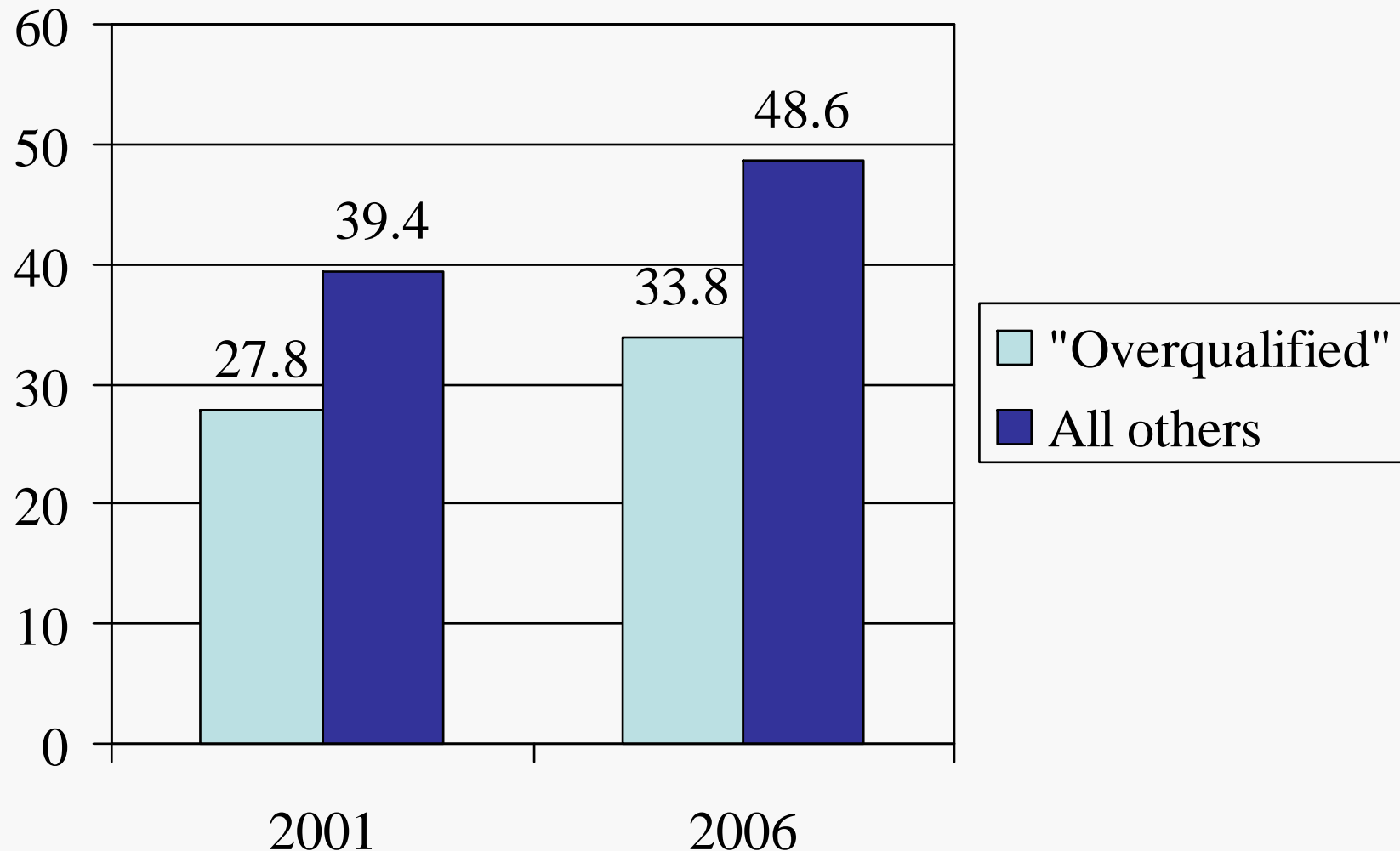
‘In your job, how important is using a computer, ‘PC’,
or other types of computerised equipment?’
& ‘sophistication’ computer use (with examples)



Learning at Work Rising Strongly



% who strongly agree that they have
enough opportunity to use skills in job



Conclusions/Questions

- work has been intensifying and concentrating in Britain; elsewhere too
- evidence of a plateau in recent years. Is this a turning point? Why?
- effort intensification in the 1990s was linked to technological and organisational change -- EBTC
- Can we find a way to “work smart, but not too hard” in the modern knowledge economy?