Public Says American Work Life Is Worsening, But Most Workers Remain Satisfied with Their Jobs

Americans believe that workers in this country are worse off now than a generation ago – toiling longer and harder for less in wages and benefits, for employers who aren’t as loyal as they once were, in jobs that aren’t as secure, and in a global economy that might very well send their work overseas.

Yet the public has generally taken in stride this perceived fraying of the social safety net at work, according to a new Pew Research Center nationwide survey. Most people still have positive feelings about their own jobs, and even though many are troubled by the way the forces of modernization and globalization are affecting the American workplace, the level of public concern today is not substantially greater than it had been a decade or two ago.

To be sure, most Americans are well aware that the social contract associated with work in America is going through a period of profound change – with the industrial-era model of secure jobs with good wages and benefits that predominated until roughly a generation ago giving way to a more cost-conscious and globally-competitive workplace marked by stagnant real wages, cutbacks to health benefits and retirement plans, and growing threats of having jobs outsourced abroad.

When asked whether each of eight different aspects of work life have gotten better, worse or remained the same for the typical American worker over the past 20 or 30 years, a majority or plurality of respondents in the Pew survey answered worse to all eight questions.

The telephone survey was conducted from June 20 through July 16, 2006 among a nationally representative sample of 2,003 Americans. The margin of error is plus or minus 2.5 percentage points.

These downbeat assessments do not extend to ratings of one’s own job, however. Nearly nine-in-ten employed adults in this survey say they are either completely (28%) or mostly (61%)