

Developing a  
Culture of  
Work-Life  
Balance



*Numerous studies point to the fact that employees are working longer hours than ever before.*

*Work schedules are becoming increasingly erratic. More people are working evenings, overnight, or on rotating shifts. And, even among those who work more traditional hours, many are now operating in a global economy and a high-technology society which often means having to extend the working day to accommodate clients and colleagues several time zones apart.*

*Couple all of this with the prevalence of two-career families and you have the recipe for work-life balance concerns.*

Recent research from Hay Group backs up these worries. More than one in four employees (27 percent) working at organizations that are not perceived to support work-life balance plan to leave their companies within the next two years. That's compared to only 17 percent of those working for companies that rank among the top quartile for the support of employees in achieving a reasonable balance between work and personal life.

To put this into a business context, for an organization with 10,000 employees, this 10 percentage point reduction in turnover over two years would result in savings of \$17.5 million (assuming an average salary of \$35,000 and an average replacement cost of 50 percent of salary).

And work-life balance concerns, globally, are rising. Our research reveals that 39 percent of employees indicate that they did not have a "good balance" between work and personal life, a 7 percentage point increase from 12 months prior.

Results varied throughout the world, but the underlying trend remains the same – companies are not truly addressing work-life balance concerns.

Organizations in Central America ranked the lowest in work-life balance concerns, with 30 percent of employees saying their organization did not support them in achieving a reasonable balance between work and personal life.

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North America followed close behind with 35 percent, followed by Eastern Asia (37 percent), Latin America and the Caribbean (37 percent) and Southern Asia (38 percent).

In Western Europe however, 56 percent of employees said their organizations did not support them in achieving a reasonable work-life balance, an 11 percentage point increase from the year prior. That's compared to 44 percent of employees in Eastern Europe.

More specifically in Spain, 44 percent of employees said their companies did not support work-life balance, compared to 50 percent of employees in Germany and 59 percent in France. The United Kingdom fell in the middle with 49 percent of employees not reporting support when it comes to work-life balance.

Regional work-life balance perceptions ranked the worst in Africa and the Middle East.

In Africa, 56 percent of employees did not perceive work-life balance support from their companies. Southern Africa ranked the highest among the regions with 57 percent of employees not perceiving work-life balance support from their company, a 9 percentage point increase.

Similarly, in the Middle East, 48 percent of employees felt they did not get support from their organizations around work-life balance.

## **What can organizations throughout the world do to respond to these work-life balance concerns?**

Typical approaches have been tactical, seeking to provide employees with more flexibility in where and when they work. Organizations have emphasized telecommuting options, flexible work schedules, compressed work weeks, on-site day care, and the like. While these benefits are certainly helpful, are they addressing the fundamental problem?

For today's maxed-out workers, professional and personal demands simply leave them with too much to do and too little time to do it.

Given that time available for work is finite and work demands are unlikely to decrease any time soon, long-term solutions to work-life balance issues also need to focus on helping employees work more productively.

As part of our research, we explored the relationships between employee enablement and work-life balance. We isolated a best-practice group of organizations that scored in the top quartile on employee's ratings of their sensitivity to work-life balance concerns and compared them with organizations scoring in the bottom quartile on this issue, examining a wide range of workplace practices.

The results suggest that organizations do indeed need to do more than just offer flexible work schedules and telecommuting programs to help employees manage work and personal responsibilities. The organizations that are judged by employees to be most sensitive to their personal lives effectively manage a broader set of workplace dynamics. Leaders within these organizations:

- Provide clear direction regarding organizational priorities to help employees focus on the highest value tasks
- Implement policies and practices consistently to ensure that workloads are fairly and equitably distributed
- Emphasize high levels of teamwork within and across organizational units to provide employees with access to support from co-workers in coping with work demands
- Support training, development, and empowerment opportunities to ensure that employees at all levels have the skills and decision-making authority to get the job done
- Provide adequate resources (e.g. tools, equipment, supplies) to enable employees to execute work tasks efficiently and with high quality
- Have stopped the resistance to hiring people resources because of the uncertainty of the economic environment

By permitting employees to complete the most vital tasks as efficiently as possible, organizations with **enabling** environments limit the extent to which work tasks “crowd out” personal time.

At the same time, even when workloads are heavy, employees are likely to feel far better about staying late or coming in early if they are working on tasks with a clear and compelling purpose, provided with adequate resources and support from colleagues, and given the authority necessary to make decisions on how best to accomplish their objectives.

#### About Hay Group Insight

Hay Group Insight, Hay Group’s survey research division, is a global leader in employee opinion research. Through customized survey programs focused on organizational objectives, we partner with clients to attract and retain talent, improve operating efficiency, manage change more effectively, and enhance customer loyalty and organizational performance.

To read more about employee engagement and enablement, visit our website  
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