

The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong Survey

A Five Year Overview • The Need for Flexible Work Arrangements • A Post 80s' Perspective



2010

A Summary of Research Findings

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Acknowledgements

Community Business is grateful to the Community Business Leadership Team and its Work-Life Balance Survey Taskforce for their continued support of this research which has been conducted on an annual basis since 2006. In particular Community Business would like to thank the sponsors of this 2010 Survey for their financial support including: Bayer Group of Companies in Hong Kong, CLP Power Hong Kong Limited, The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited, KPMG, Mallesons Stephen Jaques, Marks & Spencer, MTR Corporation, The Prudential Assurance Company Limited and Standard Chartered Bank (Hong Kong) Limited.

Community Business would also like to acknowledge the Public Opinion Programme at the University of Hong Kong for their continued partnership in this research - for providing strategic advice on the methodology and new questions to be included in this year's survey, as well as for conducting the Survey itself.

Thank you to Shalini Mahtani and Kate Vernon for editing and to Sandy Chan for assisting in the design and the production of this Summary Report.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong 2010 Survey (2010 Survey) continues to show that work-life balance poses significant challenges to employees in Hong Kong and provides a compelling business case for employers to address the issue of work-life balance in their organisations. Community Business has conducted this survey on an annual basis since 2006. In this report we identify key trends over the past five years, take a look at the role of flexible work arrangements as a way to improve the work-life balance of employees in Hong Kong, as well as examine the perspectives of Generation Y, commonly referred to in Hong Kong as the Post 80s¹ generation.

Employees work long hours and their work-life balance is still far from ideal

The results of this 2010 Survey reveal that employees work long hours - on average they work 48.7 hours per week. This is 22% higher than the 40 hours recommended by the International Labour Organisation. Despite the fact that employees are spending slightly more time on personal activities (11.4 hours per week in 2010 as compared to 11.2 hours in 2009), the actual work-life ratio is still far from what employees consider ideal (actual work-life ratio: 83:17; preferred work-life ratio: 61:39). In addition, employees give a score of only 5.7 out of 10 for the extent to which they think their ideal work-life balance has been achieved.

Business case: negative impact of poor work-life balance and risk of losing talent

Over three-quarters of employees (77.7%) report that they have encountered problems related to health, family and productivity due to poor work-life balance. The results also reveal alarmingly that more employees are considering alternative employment - almost four out of ten employees (39.0% in 2010 as compared to 30.1% in 2009) cite that they would consider leaving their current job for better work-life balance. This finding highlights clearly that employers who fail to take the issue of work-life balance seriously risk losing significant numbers of their workforce.

Employees' work-life balance has improved slightly since 2006 - however, employees' satisfaction with work and life has remained unchanged

Based on the working hours of employees and their actual work-life ratio over the past five years (see Figure 1 and 2a on page 5), employees' work-life balance has gradually improved over the years. Encouragingly too, more employees are offered a 5-day work week in 2010 (45.7%) compared to 2007 (35.0%). However, despite this slight improvement, employees continue to give a relatively low score (5.7 out of 10) for the extent to which they think their ideal work-life balance has been achieved, reflecting that their overall level of satisfaction with their work-life balance remains unchanged. This suggests that employees' expectations regarding work-life balance are rising. This is further supported by the trend that since 2008, employees' desire for more personal time has increased (preferred work-life ratio: 62.3:37.7 in 2008; 61.6:38.4 in 2009; 61.0:39.0 in 2010).

Flexible work arrangements as a solution to better work-life balance

The 2010 Survey shows that more than half of employees (57.3%) think flexible work arrangements are an important factor when deciding whether to join or stay with an organisation, this is especially true for Post 80s employees (68.1%). The most popular flexible work arrangements desired by employees are flexible working time (27.3%), followed by career breaks, unpaid/part-paid personal leave or sabbatical (19.4%) and the option to work from home or remotely sometimes (14.3%). A compressed work week is also highlighted by Post 80s employees as one of the most desired flexible work arrangements (20.1% of Post 80s employees). Whilst there is an improvement in the number of companies offering a 5-day work week, 37.6% of employees say that their companies do not offer any type of flexible work arrangement at all.

¹ There are different definitions for the term "Post 80s". For the purpose of this report, we refer to "Post 80s" as people born between 1980 and 1995, ie people who in 2010 are between the ages of 15 and 30.



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Expectations of Post 80s generation

This year, we examine whether there is any significant difference between the responses of younger employees, the Post 80s, versus other generations. The findings reveal that Post 80s employees have a very different set of expectations with regard to work-life balance. Some of these are highlighted below:

- On average, Post 80s employees spend significantly more time on their personal activities (Post 80s: 13.3 hours per week; Non-Post 80s: 10.4 hours).
- More employees from the Post 80s generation say they experience a negative impact due to poor work-life balance (Post 80s: 83.3%; Non-Post 80s: 75.9%).
- More than six out of ten Post 80s employees would consider leaving their current job for better work-life balance elsewhere (Post 80s: 61.5%; Non-Post 80s: 30.3%).

Conclusion

After 5 years of looking at work-life balance, this 2010 Survey reveals that whilst there has been some progress with work-life balance in Hong Kong, employers still have some way to go in addressing the needs of their employees. Working hours are gradually reducing and more employers are offering a shorter working week to their employees. However, much more can be done in terms of offering flexible work arrangements that allow employees to manage their roles and responsibilities both at work and in their personal lives. The importance of addressing this issue has been highlighted by two main findings: firstly, four in ten employees would consider leaving their current job for better work-life balance elsewhere and secondly, the majority of employees (77.7%) say they are negatively impacted as a direct result of poor work-life balance - and this is particularly true for Post 80s employees (83.3%). Companies that continue to ignore work-life balance as a business imperative do so at their peril. Community Business urges companies to reflect on the findings of this report and to engage with employees to better understand the work-life balance challenges they face and the solutions they are looking for.



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INTRODUCTION

Background

Community Business and the Community Business Leadership Team (CBLT), a unique group of business leaders committed to raising awareness of issues relating to corporate social responsibility, have championed the importance of work-life balance as a business issue in Hong Kong since 2006. For five years running the CBLT has commissioned research into the state of work-life balance in Hong Kong. This annual “State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong Survey” has become the authoritative reference source for businesses looking to understand issues relating to work-life balance and to develop appropriate work-life balance policies and strategies for their employees in Hong Kong.

The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong 2010 Survey

Like all the previous surveys, the 2010 Survey is a representative survey of the working population in Hong Kong and was conducted by the Public Opinion Programme (POP) at the University of Hong Kong. Using a computer-assisted technique, more than 1000 random telephone interviews were conducted with full time workers of all levels in Hong Kong.

Purpose of This Research

This Survey is designed to assess the overall state of work-life balance in Hong Kong by examining the following:

- Employees’ working and living patterns
- Employee’s satisfaction with work and life
- Problems employees face in achieving a healthy work-life balance and their desired solutions to overcome such challenges

This 2010 Survey also seeks to address the following:

- How has the state of work-life balance changed over the past five years?
- How important are flexible work arrangements to employees and what are the most desired flexible working options?
- Do expectations of work-life balance differ between Post 80s and Non-Post 80s employees - and if so, how?

Summary of Research Findings

This Summary Report identifies the key findings that are deemed to be of interest to the business community. These are presented in the following sections:

1. Findings at a Glance: The State of Work-Life Balance 2010
2. A Five Year Overview: Key Trends from 2006 to 2010
3. The Need for Flexible Work Arrangements
4. A Post 80s’ Perspective

For further details of the 2010 Survey, including methodology, demographics, survey questions and significant variation of findings by gender, industry, income level and age, please refer to the full report written by the POP which is available online on the Community Business website at www.communitybusiness.org.



The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong 2010 Survey

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1. FINDINGS AT A GLANCE:

The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong 2010 Survey has revealed the following key findings:

Actual Working Hours and Personal Time

- Employees in Hong Kong work long hours - on average they work 48.7 hours per week (48.4 hours per week in 2009). This exceeds the standard set by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) by 21.8%. (See Figure 1 on page 5)
- Employees spend on average 11.4 hours per week on personal activities (11.2 hours per week in 2009). Although the data shows that employees are spending more time on personal activities, this increase is statistically insignificant. (See Figure 1 on page 5)

Actual and Ideal Work-Life Ratio

- Employees' work-life balance is far from what they consider ideal. Their preferred work-life ratio in 2010 is 61:39 while the actual work-life ratio of employees is 83:17. (See Figures 2a and 2b on page 5) This shows that there continues to be a significant gap between employees' ideal work-life balance and reality.

Degree of Achieving Ideal Work-Life Balance

- The score given by employees for the extent to which they have achieved their ideal work-life balance remains the same as 2009 at 5.7 out of 10. (See Figure 3 on page 6)

Impact of Poor Work-Life-Balance

- 77.7% of employees report that they experience a negative impact due to poor life balance.
- The top three cited problems are: (See Figure I on page 11)
 - Prolonged fatigue level, sleepiness and extreme tiredness (57.2%)
 - Not having time to spend with partner and family (37.0%)
 - Having insomnia and poor diet as a result of work pressure (34.9%)
- In 2010 respondents were also asked if they have taken up any harmful behaviour, such as cigarette smoking or excessive use of alcohol, caffeine and drugs, as a result of poor work-life balance. 12.2% claim that they have done so.

Employers' Effort in Promoting Work-Life Balance

- An average score of 4.8 out of 10 is given to employers in terms of the effort and resources spent on promoting work-life balance, suggesting that there is room for employers to do more (4.7 in 2009).
- The work-life initiatives offered most frequently to employees in Hong Kong are: (See Figure 5 on page 8)
 - 5-day work week (45.7%)
 - Career breaks, unpaid/part-paid personal leave or sabbaticals (35.4%)
 - Flexible working time (28.3%)
- The number of companies offering a 5-day work week has increased significantly since 2007 - from 35.0% then to 45.7% today.
- 37.6% of employees are not offered any kind of flexible work arrangement. In addition, almost one-fifth (19.6%) of employees do not have the option to take up any kind of work-life initiative with their employer.

The Need for Flexible Work Arrangements

- Over half of all employees (57.3%) think flexible work arrangements are important when considering joining or staying with an organisation. (See Figure 4 on page 7)
- The three most desired flexible work arrangements are: (See Figure 6 on page 8)
 - Flexible working time (27.3%)
 - Career breaks, unpaid/part-paid personal leave or sabbaticals (19.4%)
 - Option to work remotely/at home sometimes (14.3%)
- Only 7.4% of employees claim that they do not desire any flexible work arrangement.

Leaving Current Job for Better Work-Life Balance

- Almost four out of ten employees (39.0%) claim that they would consider leaving their current job for better work-life balance. This percentage represents a significant increase from last year (30.1%) and likely reflects the improvement of the economic environment. (See Figure II on page 11)



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2. A FIVE YEAR OVERVIEW: KEY TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2010

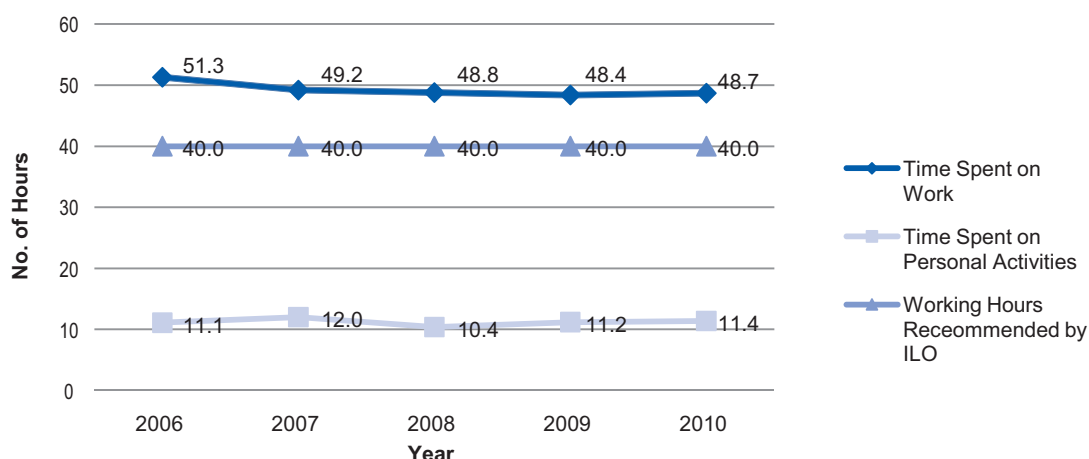
Actual Working Hours

Figure 1 shows that there has been a general downward trend in the number of actual working hours of employees in Hong Kong since 2006 with only a slight increase in 2010. Despite this slight reduction in working hours, the actual working hours consistently exceed the standard set by the ILO (40 hours per week) by over 20% each year.

Time Spent on Personal Activities

Despite some level of fluctuation over the years, there has been an upward trend in the amount of time employees spend on personal activities. This is particularly the case since 2008, as time spent on personal activities has increased from 10.4 hours in 2008 to 11.4 hours in 2010.

Figure 1. Actual Time Spent on Work and Personal Activities (2006 to 2010)



Actual and Ideal Work-Life Ratio

Likewise there has been a slight improvement in the actual work-life ratio since 2008 with the percentage of time spent on work reducing from 84.1% in 2008 to 82.7% in 2010.

Since 2008, there has also been an upward trend in employees' ideal work-life ratio, showing that people are wanting to spend more time on personal activities.

Figure 2a. Actual Work-Life Ratio (2006 to 2010)

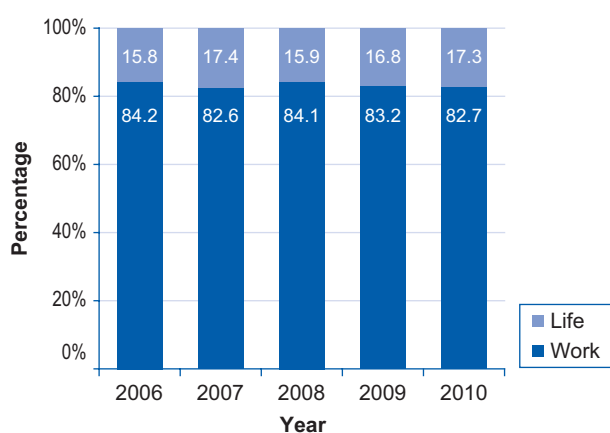
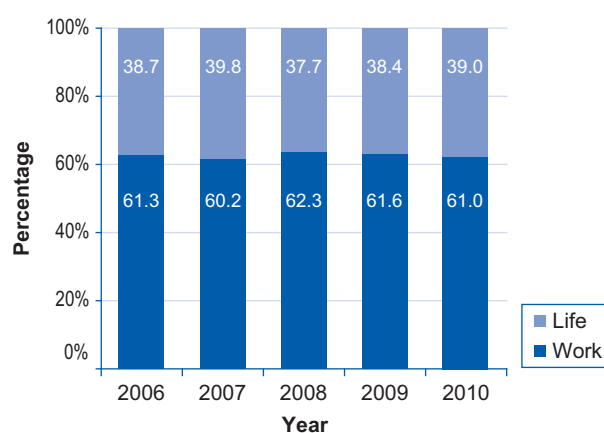


Figure 2b. Ideal Work-Life Ratio (2006 to 2010)





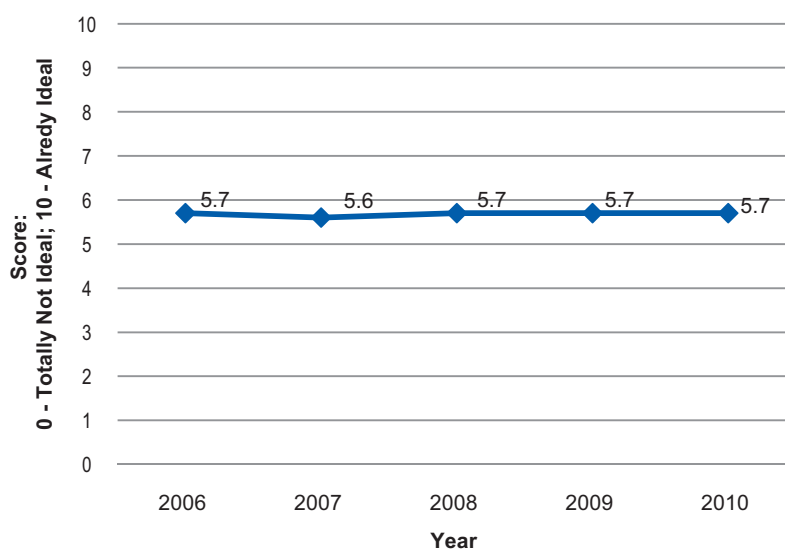
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Employees' Satisfaction Towards Work and Life

As shown in Figure 3, the score given by employees to assess the extent to which they feel they have achieved their ideal work-life balance has remained fairly static over the past five years at 5.7 points out of 10. This is interesting, because although the findings show that employees are spending less time working and more time on personal activities, their satisfaction with their work-life balance has not improved. This suggests that Hong Kong employees' expectations of work-life balance are rising and is further supported by the upward trend, since 2008, of employees' desire for more personal time - mentioned earlier in this section.





Figure 3. Degree to Which Employees Have Achieved Their Ideal Work-Life Balance (2006 to 2010)





3. THE NEED FOR FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS

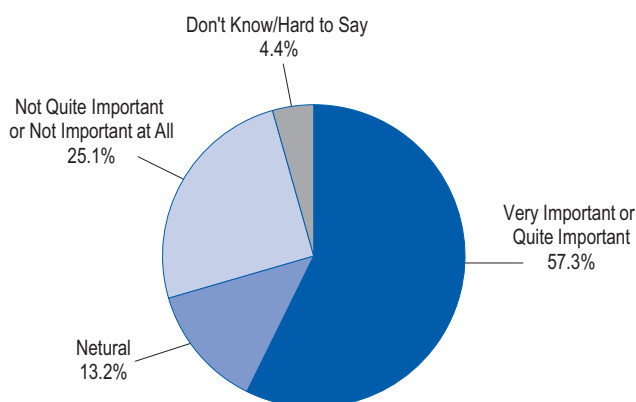
Flexible work arrangements involve an employee and an employer making changes to when, where and how a person works to better meet individual and business needs. These may include arrangements such as flexible working hours, part-time work, compressed hours, working remotely/from home, job sharing, etc.² For employers who are looking for ways to support staff to achieve a better work-life balance, it is useful to understand the importance of flexible working and what type of flexible work arrangement employees in Hong Kong think would most assist them to achieve a better work-life balance.



In this section, we highlight the key findings in the survey as they relate to flexible work arrangements. Where there is significant variation by gender , industry , income level  and age , and the findings are deemed to be of interest to business this is highlighted.

The Importance of Flexible Work Arrangements

Respondents were asked how important flexible work arrangements are to them as they think about joining or staying in a company. As shown in Figure 4, more than half of them (57.3%) consider it to be very or quite important.

Figure 4. Importance of Flexible Work Arrangements (2010)



Demographic Variable	Key Findings
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More respondents from lower income groups regard flexible work arrangements as an important factor when deciding whether to join or remain working in an organisation as compared to those from higher income groups (HK\$10,000 or below: 60.1%; HK\$10,001 to HK\$20,000: 60.1%; HK\$20,001 to HK\$30,000: 53.2%; HK\$30,001 to HK\$40,000: 58.9%; HK\$40,001 or above: 50.0%).
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The younger the age of respondents, the more important flexible work arrangements are as a factor for deciding whether to join or remain working in an organisation (age 15 to 30: 68.1%; age 31 to 40: 59.0%; age 41 to 50: 53.5%; age 51 or above: 46.2%).

² See "What is Workplace Flexibility? - Workplace Flexibility". Available online at http://www.workplaceflexibility.com.au/what_is_workplace_flexibility.html.



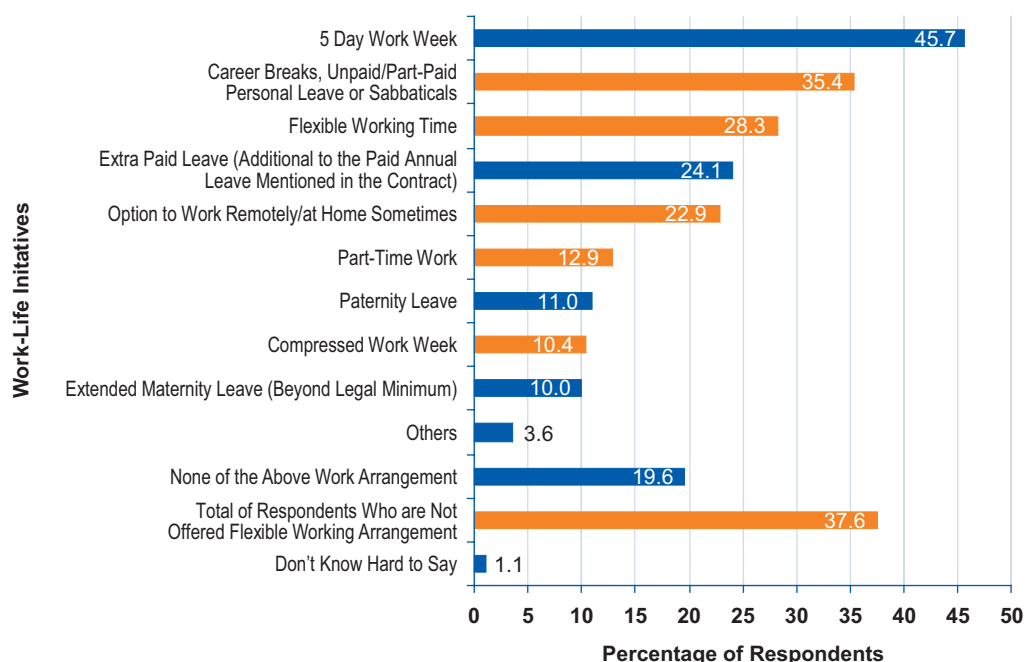
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The Availability of Different Types of Flexible Work Arrangements

Respondents were asked what types of work-life initiatives, including flexible work arrangements, their organisation currently provides. Figure 5 highlights the availability of the key flexible work arrangements that employers currently provide - in orange. 61.3% of respondents say their employer currently provides some kind of flexible work arrangement, with the most common options being: career breaks, unpaid/part-paid leave or sabbaticals (35.4%), followed by flexible working time (28.3%) and the option to work remotely/at home sometimes (22.9%). 37.6% of employees are not offered any type of flexible work arrangement.

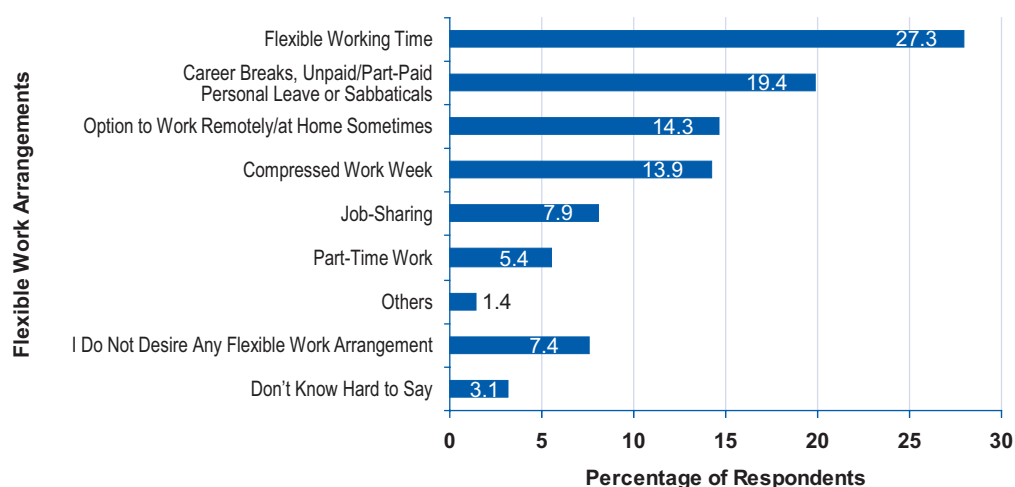
Figure 5. Flexible Work Arrangement Currently Provided by Employer (2010)



Employees' Desired Flexible Work Arrangements

Respondents were asked which type of flexible work arrangement they would desire most in order to help them achieve a better work-life balance and given a list of options to choose from. As shown in Figure 6, by far the most desired flexible work arrangement is flexible working time (27.3%), followed by career breaks, unpaid/part-paid leave or sabbaticals (19.4%) and the option to work remotely/at home sometimes (14.3%).

Figure 6. Most Desired Flexible Work Arrangements (2010)








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Demographic Variable	Key Findings
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employees from different industries have different preferences when it comes to flexible work arrangements. The list below shows the arrangements that are most favoured by employees in different industries. <div> <div>Flexible working time</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bank and Finance Commercial Service Construction Education Film/Entertainment * Government/Public Affairs Import/Export Trade Law, Accountancy, Professional Information Services Manufacturing Medical, Hygiene and Welfare Oil, Energy, Resources and Utilities * Other Personal Services Telecommunications * </div> <div> <div>Career breaks, unpaid/part-paid</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medical, Hygiene and Welfare Restaurant/Hotels Transportation Warehouse Duties * Wholesale/Retail </div> <p><i>* Industries marked with an asterisk (*) represent a sub-sample size which means that there were less than 30 respondents from this industry. Statistically speaking, the smaller the sample size, the larger the sampling error. Findings for these industries are therefore for indication only.</i></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is consistent across all income groups that flexible working time tops the list as the most desired flexible work arrangement for better work-life balance. Employees from lower income groups also prefer career breaks, unpaid/part-paid personal leave or sabbaticals while significantly more respondents from higher income groups would like to have the option to work remotely/at home sometimes.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexible working time ranks as the most desired flexible work arrangement across all age groups. However a compressed work week is more popular with younger employees, in particular the Post 80s (20.1%) compared to Non-Post 80s respondents (11.4%).



4. A POST 80S' PERSPECTIVE

The term Post 80s in Hong Kong is equivalent to the frequently used term Generation Y and refers to those who are born in the 1980s or later.³ The Post 80s generation has generally grown up in a more prosperous and stable environment than that of their parents' generation. For the most part, they have been more exposed to the global world and are more familiar with technology and digital communications than previous generations. As a result, their views towards life and working may be very different to that of previous generations. It is interesting therefore, to consider the perspectives of Post 80s employees with regard to work-life balance and compare these with those of employees from other generations.

A summary of the views of the Post 80s and Non-Post 80s respondents is shown in the table below, with significant differences highlighted in orange. The most striking statistic that should be observed by employers is that as many as 61.5% of Post 80s respondents say they would consider leaving their current employer for better work-life balance.

Work-Life Balance Measures	Post 80s	Non-Post 80s
Actual Working Hours	48.7 hours per week	48.8 hours per week
Time Spent on Personal Activities	13.3 hours per week	10.4 hours per week
Actual Work-Life Ratio	80:20	84:16
Ideal Work-Life Ratio	60:40	62:38
Degree of Achieving Ideal Work-Life Balance	5.6	5.7
Percentage of Respondents Who Experience Negative Impact of Poor Work-Life Balance	83.3%	75.9%
Score Given to Employers in Terms of Promoting Work-Life Balance	4.7	4.8
Percentage of Respondents Who Think Flexible Work Arrangement is Important	68.1%	53.2%
Top 3 Most Desired Flexible Work Arrangement	1. Flexible working time (29.5%) 2. Career breaks, unpaid/part-paid personal leave or sabbaticals (23.3%) 3. Compressed work week (20.1%)	1. Flexible working time (26.8%) 2. Career breaks, unpaid/part-paid personal leave or sabbaticals (17.8%) 3. Option to work remotely/at home sometimes (13.9%)
Percentage of Respondents Who Do Not Desire Any Flexible Work Arrangement	3.1%	9.0%
Percentage of Respondents Who Would Consider Leaving Current Job for Better Work-Life Balance	61.5%	30.3%

³ Gen Y or Generation Y generally refers to those born between 1980 and the early 1990s. See www.businessdictionary.com/definition/Generation-Y.html



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APPENDIX: ADDITIONAL GRAPHS

Figure I. Problems Resulting From Poor Work-Life Balance (2010)

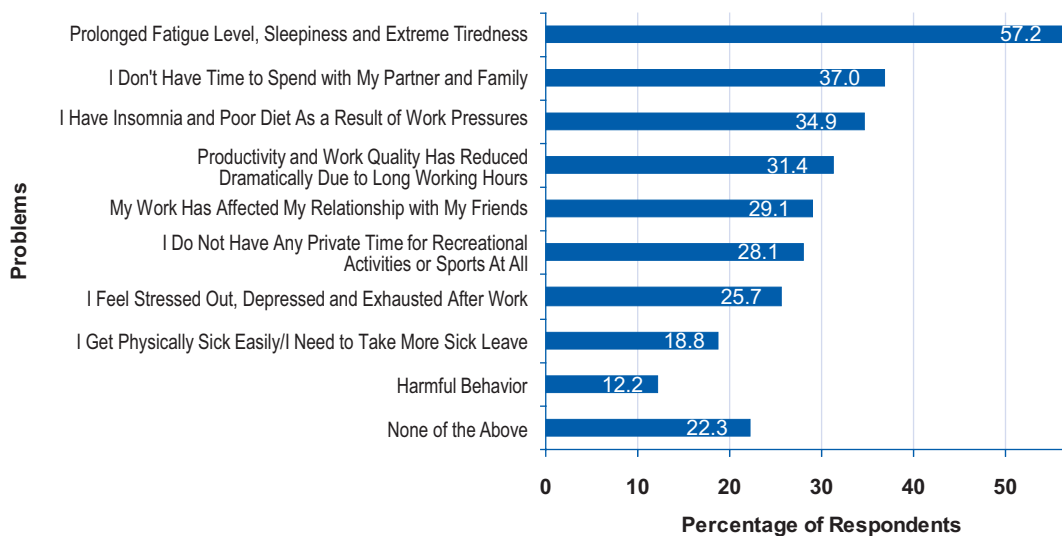
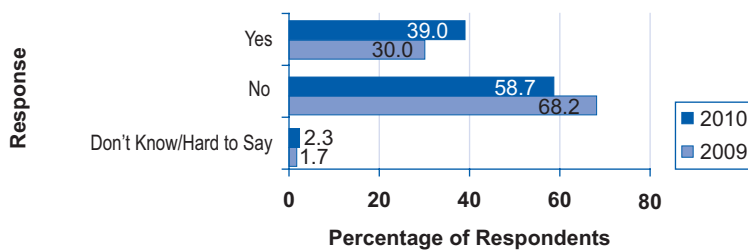
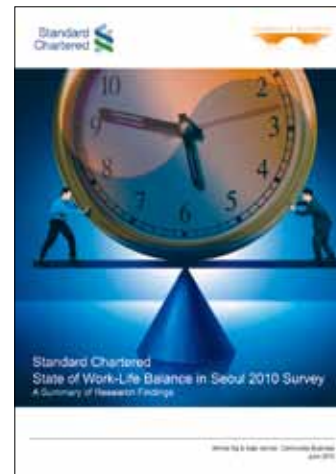
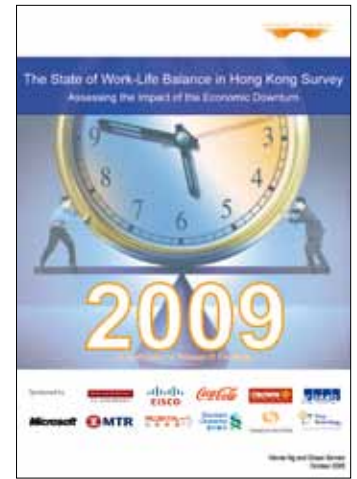
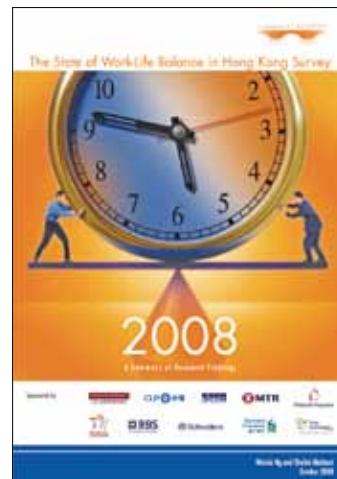
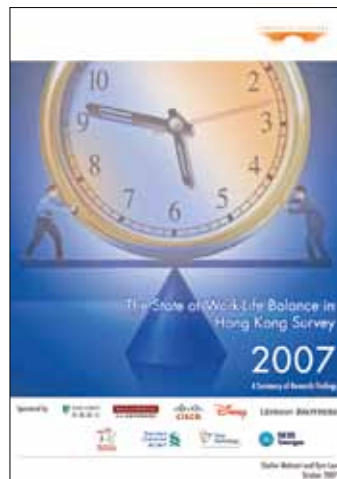


Figure II. Consider Leaving Current Job for Better Work-Life Balance (2010 and 2009)



NOTES



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