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7 out of 10 Hong Kong employees say Work-Life Balance is critical to productivity and choice of employers

Latest survey shows senior business leaders must take the lead to address work-life issues

16 October 2012: Work-life balance is a critical factor affecting motivation, productivity and attraction and retention of talent, believes the majority of employees in Hong Kong (71.8%), according to a new survey released today by Community Business, a non-profit organization which supports Hong Kong businesses to become better corporate citizens.

This is a clear indication of a strong business case for companies to address work-life issues faced by their employees. This seventh annual benchmark survey has been released to highlight the need for Hong Kong businesses to take action in order to remain competitive and attract and retain the best people.

Clear Business Case for Companies to Address Work-Life Issues

- 71.8% of employees see work-life balance as a critical factor affecting productivity, engagement and attraction and retention of talent. In particular:
 - 25.8% of employees say work-life balance is among the top 3 factors affecting their motivation and productivity at work
 - 24.1% say that work-life balance is more important than money when they choose to join, stay with or leave a company
 - 21.9% say that work-life balance is among the top 3 factors they consider when they choose to join, stay with or leave a company

Work-Life Issues Remain Sensitive and Culture of “Face Time” Still Exist

Many companies in Hong Kong fear that addressing work-life issues will damage their competitiveness because it means that people will work less. They fail to realise that work-life balance is in fact a tool for enhancing productivity and reputation for the business.

- 30.7% of employees say work-life balance is not talked about in their company.
- 18% feel that they cannot raise concerns about work-life balance if they want to get ahead in their company.

The culture of “face time” continues to plague the Hong Kong workplace.

- 21.4% of employees see that most people do not leave work before their bosses/supervisors do
- 11.9% feel that the longer they stay in the office the more committed they are perceived to be

Role of Technology in Shaping Hong Kong’s Work-Life Culture

- 42.7% of employees think that the use of mobile technology like Blackberry has a negative impact on their overall work-life balance. The main reasons are:
 - “I can never really switch off, even when I am sleeping or on holiday” (28.3%)
 - “I am expected to check and respond to work emails and communications any time of the day” (14.4%)
- 15.4% of employees think that the use of mobile technology has a positive impact on their work-life balance. The main reasons are:
 - “I can work more flexibly – both in terms of time and location” (11.2%)
 - “I can leave office earlier compared to if I do not have the mobile devices” (4.2%)

It is clear that technology is a double-edged sword. It supports flexibility if it is used in a positive and empowering manner. Otherwise it only serves to expand the time and space for work to be done and raises expectations of availability, creating pressure on employees to be ever present.

Mismatch of Work-Life Initiatives Provided and Desired

- Employees say the most effective work-life initiative is flexible working time (36%).
- However the most commonly available work-life initiative provided by employers is career breaks/unpaid or part-paid leave (35.5%).
- Only 25% of employees say their organisations offer flexible working time.
- Around 24% of employees say their employers are not offering any work-life initiatives at all.

There is an obvious need for companies to examine the needs of their workforce and identify what work-life initiatives will provide the best results. Flexibility in when, where and how employees work will be a solution for increasing competitiveness and ability to attract the best talent.

Senior Business Leaders Need to Lead the Discussion for Work-Life Balance in Organisations in Hong Kong

- 52% of employees think that senior business leaders should take primary responsibility for improving work-life balance in their organisations.
- 15.7%, especially the younger generation, thinks that it is every person's responsibility.
- 22.5% say that the lack of understanding of importance of work-life balance to productivity and talent retention is a top 3 contributor to the current working culture in Hong Kong.

This shows that there is an urgent need to better understand the impact of poor work-life balance on the business by senior business leaders, who needs to take on the responsibility to establish accountability for better work-life balance in every employee.

Call for Action

Hong Kong businesses have pledged to 'make a change' during Work-Life Balance Week – an annual campaign since 2008 to raise awareness of work-life balance as a business imperative - and are implementing strategies to encourage a better Work-Life Balance for their employees. For example, this has included simple commitments such as ensuring employees go home on time, or providing training to employees, to more extensive strategies for supporting employees in the workplace in the long term.

Robin Bishop, Chief Operating Officer of Community Business, is keen to work with businesses to establish mutual accountability for work-life balance:

"This year's research shows that there is a clear mismatch between work-life initiatives provided by employers and those desired by employees. Implementing flexibility in working time and location will be the solution to the "face time" culture in the Hong Kong workplace. Technology will play a key role to this end, but instilling boundaries and guidelines on expectations created by technology will be critical. Senior business leaders must take the lead to engage employees in a two-way dialogue; to generate better understanding of the business case for work-life balance and establish mutual responsibility for work-life balance."

Examples of what companies are doing to mark Work-Life Balance Week 2012:

Nomura	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fitness talk • Family hike • Working Parents Lunch • Work-Life Balance manager "in-house" seminar • Family dinner
Baker & McKenzie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily work-life balance tip in e-newsletter • Panel discussion on flexibility • Fitness talk • Nutrition and health talk

Super Star Group (鴻星集團)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy eating: Chef creates healthy dish to raise the awareness of healthy eating • Fruity Days • Singing Contest
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If you would like more information on what companies are doing to mark Work-Life Balance Week 2012, or if you are looking to speak with/interview a company participating in the Week, please contact Amanda Yik at amanda@communitybusiness.org or 2152 1889.

About Community Business

Community Business is a unique membership based non-profit organisation whose mission is to lead, inspire and support businesses to continually improve their positive impact on people and communities. Community Business provides training, facilitation and advice to some of the world's largest companies in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and its major areas of focus include CSR strategy and policy, corporate community investment and diversity in the workplace. Founded in 2003 and based in Hong Kong, Community Business currently works with a number of organisations, small, medium and large, committed to CSR.

For more information, visit www.communitybusiness.org

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