



The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong Survey

Examining Hong Kong's work-life culture and establishing responsibility for positive change



2012

A Summary of Research Findings

About Community Business

Community Business is a unique membership based non-profit organisation whose mission is to lead, inspire and support businesses to improve their positive impact on people and communities. Community Business provides training, facilitation and advice to some of the world's leading companies in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and its major areas of focus include: CSR strategy, community investment, diversity and inclusion and work-life balance. 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

Acknowledgements

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

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INTRODUCTION

Background

Community Business has championed the importance of work-life balance as a strategic business issue since 2006. For seven years running, Community Business 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 an authoritative reference source for organisations looking to understand issues relating to work-life balance and those seeking to develop appropriate work-life balance initiatives and strategies for their employees in Hong Kong.

The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong 2012 Survey Methodology

In line with previous research, the 2012 Survey is a representative survey of the working population in Hong Kong and was conducted by the Public Opinion Programme at the University of Hong Kong (HKUPOP). Using a computer-assisted technique, more than 1000 random telephone interviews were conducted with workers of all levels in Hong Kong. The maximum sampling error of all percentages is $\pm 3.2\%$ at 95% confidence level.

Purpose of This Research

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

- Hong Kong’s work-life culture and the key factors that shape it
- Availability and uptake of work-life initiatives
- The business case for work-life balance



A new theme we hope to explore through this year’s survey is Hong Kong’s work-life culture. Through Community Business’ recent research *Driving Cultural Change to Achieve Work-Life Balance* (2011), it is clear that various barriers to work-life balance exist in organisations throughout Hong Kong. In order to break down these barriers, companies must cultivate a supportive culture that enables and empowers both employers and employees to achieve better work-life balance. Through this survey we hope to shed some light on what it will take for the necessary cultural shift to take place in Hong Kong.

Summary of Research Findings

This report identifies the key findings that will be of interest to the corporate sector. These are presented in the following sections:

1. Findings at a Glance: The State of Work-Life Balance 2012
2. Employees’ Satisfaction with Work and Life in Hong Kong
3. Availability, Effectiveness and Uptake of Work-Life Initiatives
4. Work-Life Culture in Hong Kong
5. The Role of Technology in Shaping the Work-Life Culture in Hong Kong
6. The Importance of Work-Life Balance as a Strategic Business Issue
7. Establishing Mutual Responsibility for Work-Life Balance

For further details of the 2012 Survey including methodology, demographics, survey questions and significant variation of findings by gender, industry, type of employer, education and income level, age, parental/carer status, please refer to the full report written by HKUPOP which is available online on the Community Business website at www.communitybusiness.org/images/cb/publications/2012/WLB_Report_2012_EN.pdf

In this report, we have highlighted variations by gender , industry , education level , income level , type of employer , age , parental/carer status  that are statistically significant and of business interest.



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1. FINDINGS AT A GLANCE: THE STATE OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE 2012

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 is 6.0 out of 10.
- This is a slight decrease from last year but is consistent with the rating reported over the past 6 years, indicating that the state of work-life balance in Hong Kong has not improved.

Availability of Work-Life Initiatives

- The work-life initiatives offered most frequently to employees in Hong Kong are:
 - Career breaks/unpaid personal leave/part-paid personal leave/sabbaticals (35.5%)
 - Job-sharing/sharing workload among colleagues on an ad hoc basis (29.6%)
 - Extra paid leave (27.2%)
 - Work support services (26.6%)
 - Flexible working time (25.0%)
- Around 24% of employees say their employers do not offer any of the work-life initiatives listed.

Effectiveness of Work-Life Initiatives

- Employees say the most effective work-life initiatives are:
 - Flexible working time (36.0%)
 - Extra paid leave (34.1%)
 - Career breaks/unpaid personal leave/part-paid personal leave/sabbaticals (25.8%)
 - Job-sharing/sharing workload among colleagues on an ad hoc basis (20.8%)
 - Work-support services (20.5%)
 - Option to work remotely or at home (16.8%)

Uptake of Work-Life Initiatives

- 58.2% of employees are currently using at least one type of work-life initiative.
- Of those who wish to but are not currently using any work-life initiatives, the top three reasons are:
 - None of the initiatives provided by the employer are useful for improving work-life balance (24.6%)
 - No one or very few people in the company has taken up work-life initiatives (8.5%)
 - I don't know if any work-life initiatives exist in my company (7.4%)

Work-Life Culture in Hong Kong

- Work-life balance remains a sensitive issue in the Hong Kong workplace:
 - 30.7% of employees say work-life balance is not talked about in their company
 - 18% of employees feel that they cannot raise concerns about work-life balance if they want to get ahead in their company
- There is still a culture of "face time" in Hong Kong:
 - 21.4% of employees see that most people do not leave work before their bosses/supervisors do
 - 11.9% of employees feel that the longer they stay in the office the more committed to work they are perceived to be



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

- 46.6% of employees use mobile technology or devices for work either after office hours or outside of the office.
- The top 3 reasons for doing so are:
 - “My boss expects me to continue to answer emails or work after leaving the office” (21.2%)
 - “My clients expect me to continue to answer emails or work after leaving the office” (18.5%)
 - “So that I can communicate with clients and/or colleagues in other international offices any time of the day” (17.4%)
- 42.7% of employees think that the use of mobile technology or devices 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 – I cannot rest fully” (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 or devices has a positive impact on their overall work-life balance.
- The main reasons are:
 - “I can work more flexibly – both in terms of time and location” (11.2%)
 - “I can leave the office earlier compared to if I do not have the mobile devices” (4.2%)

Importance of Work-Life Balance as a Strategic Business Issue

- 71.8% of employees see work-life balance as a critical factor affecting productivity, engagement, attraction and retention of talent:
- 25.8% of employees say work-life balance is among the top 3 factors affecting their motivation and productivity at work

- 24.1% of employees think that work-life balance is more important than money when they choose to join, stay with or leave a company
- 21.9% of employees think that work-life balance is among the top 3 factors they consider when they choose to join, stay with or leave a company

Responsibility for Work-Life Balance

- The top 3 contributors to the current state of work-life balance in Hong Kong are:
 - Highly competitive nature of global/international business (23.9%)
 - Hong Kong's hard work ethic (22.6%)
 - Lack of understanding of importance of work-life balance to productivity and talent retention (22.5%)
- 52% of employees think that senior business leaders should take primary responsibility for improving work-life balance in their organisations.

Observations and The Way Forward

- There is a mismatch between work-life initiatives provided by employers and those desired by employees. Implementing flexibility in working time and location will be key.
- The culture of “face time” remains pervasive. Therefore, driving cultural change is critical.
- The business case for work-life balance is clear but understanding of the positive and negative impacts are lacking.
- Technology is a double-edged sword. While it enables employees to work more flexibly, it also raises expectations of availability, which is negatively impacting work-life balance. Employers need to instill boundaries and guidelines on expectations.
- Senior business leaders must take the lead to act and engage employees in a two-way dialogue while employees must take responsibility for their own work-life balance.



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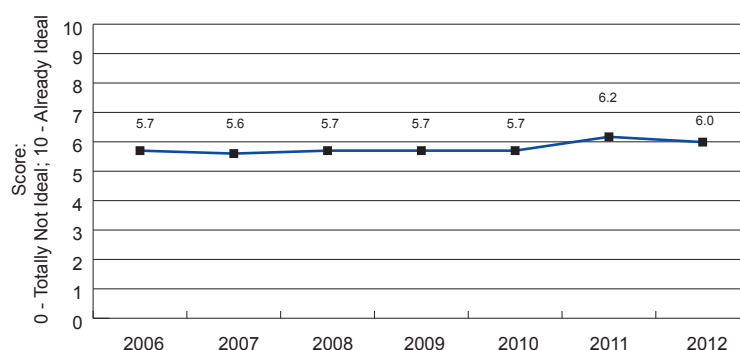
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2. EMPLOYEES' SATISFCTION TOWARDS WORK AND LIFE IN HONG KONG

In 2012, the score given by Hong Kong employees for the extent to which they have achieved their ideal work-life balance is 6.0 out of 10.

As shown in Figure 1, 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 six years. This suggests that the state of work-life balance in Hong Kong has not improved.

Figure 1: Degree to Which Employees Have Achieved Their Ideal Work-Life Balance (2006 to 2012)



Demographic Variable	Key Findings
	• Respondents in telecommunications (7.3), education (6.5) and government/public affairs (6.5) have rated themselves highest among various industries, whereas those in warehouse duties (5.1), property (5.2) and wholesale/retail (5.4) are among the lowest.
	• Rating increases with income – respondents earning HK\$10,000 or below per month rated themselves at 5.6 whereas those earning HK\$50,000 or above are at 6.7.
	• Rating is highest among those working in the government/public sector (6.7) and lowest in Hong Kong/Chinese companies (5.8).

3. AVAILABILITY, EFFECTIVENESS AND UPTAKE OF WORK-LIFE INITIATIVES

Work-life initiatives are steps taken by companies with the aim of creating a working environment that promotes work-life balance, and supports employees to achieve their own work-life balance while meeting the companies' business needs. For employers who are seeking to address work-life issues in their organisations, it is important to understand the availability, effectiveness and uptake of work-life initiatives in Hong Kong. This year we explore not only the type of initiatives made available but also the effectiveness and rate of uptake of these initiatives.



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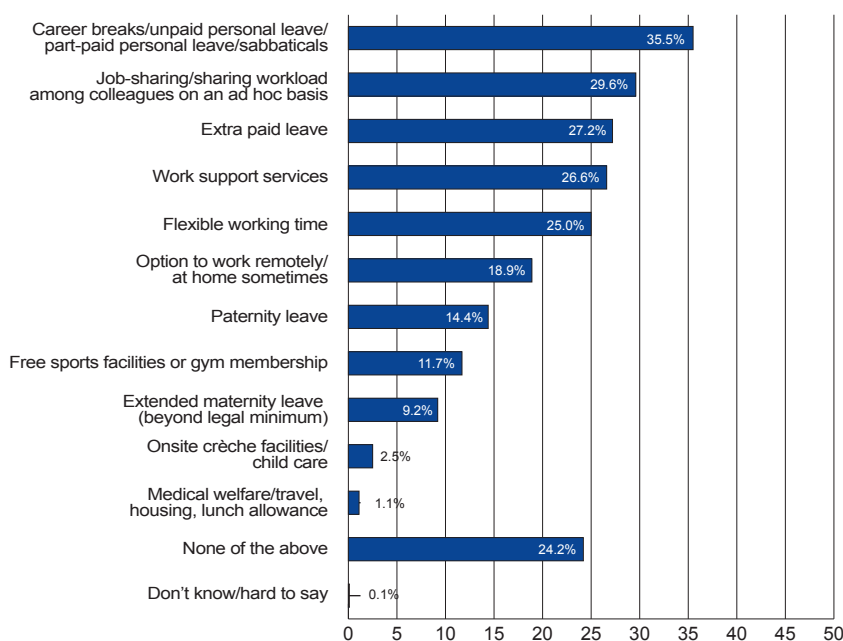
3.1 The Availability of Work-Life Initiatives

Respondents were given a list of work-life initiatives and asked which of these, including flexible work arrangements, their organisation currently provides. Figure 2 lists the work-life initiatives that are most commonly available in Hong Kong. These include:

- Career breaks/unpaid personal leave/part-paid personal leave/sabbaticals (35.5%)
- Job-sharing/sharing workload among colleagues on an ad hoc basis (29.6%)
- Extra paid leave (27.2%)
- Work support services (26.6%)
- Flexible working time (25.0%)

Around 24% of respondents say that their employers offered none of the initiatives listed in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Work-Life Initiatives Currently Provided by Employers in Hong Kong (2012)



3.2 Effectiveness of Work-Life Initiatives

Employees were given the same list and asked which type of work-life initiatives are most effective in terms of enabling them to achieve a better work-life balance. As shown in Figure 3, by far the most effective work-life initiatives from the employees' perspective are:

- Flexible working time (36.0%)
- Extra paid leave (additional to the paid annual leave mentioned in the contract) (34.1%)
- Career breaks/unpaid personal leave/part-paid personal leave/sabbaticals (25.8%)
- Job-sharing/sharing workload among colleagues on an ad hoc basis (20.8%)
- Work support services (e.g. employee counseling scheme, stress management training) (20.5%)
- Option to work remotely or from home (16.8%)



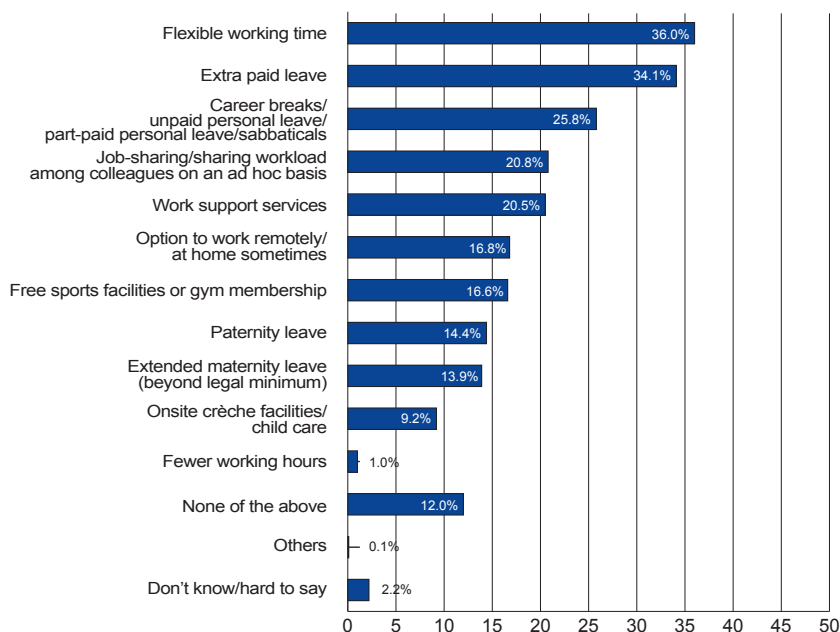
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Only 12% of respondents claim that work-life initiatives are not effective for improving their work-life balance.

Figure 3: Most Effective Work-Life Initiatives (2012)





Demographic Variable	Key Findings	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Men and women find different initiatives useful for promoting work-life balance: 	
	<div>Men</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexible working time (37.7%) Extra paid leave (31.4%) Career breaks/unpaid personal leave/part-paid personal leave/sabbaticals (23.0%) Work support services (21.1%) Option to work remotely/at home sometimes (18.6%) 	<div>Women</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extra paid leave (36.5%) Flexible working time (34.4%) Career breaks/unpaid personal leave/part-paid personal leave/sabbaticals (28.3%) Job-sharing/sharing workload among colleagues on an ad hoc basis (23.1%) Extended maternity leave (16.0%)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More employees aged between 15 to 30 see flexible working time and extra paid leave as more effective initiatives than older employees. 	



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Demographic Variable	Key Findings			
	Preference of work-life initiatives differs by industry:			
	Flexible working time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Commercial ServiceEducationFilm/EntertainmentImport/ExportInformation TechnologyLaw, Accountancy and Professional Information ServicesManufacturingRestaurant/HotelTelecommunicationsTransportationWholesale/Retail		
	Extra paid leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Banks and FinanceConstructionFilm/EntertainmentInsuranceManufacturingWarehouse duties	Career break/unpaid or part-paid personal leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Government/Public affairsFilm/Entertainment
	Option to work remotely/at home sometimes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Media		
	The most effective work-life initiatives for different types of employers are:			
	Hong Kong/Chinese companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Flexible working timeExtra paid leaveCareer breaks/unpaid personal leave/part-paid personal leave/sabbaticals	International companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Extra paid leaveFlexible working timeCareer breaks/unpaid personal leave/part-paid personal leave/sabbaticals
	Government/Public sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Flexible working timeCareer breaks/unpaid personal leave/part-paid personal leave/sabbaticalsExtra paid leave	NGO/Charitable organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Extra paid leaveFlexible working timeWork support services



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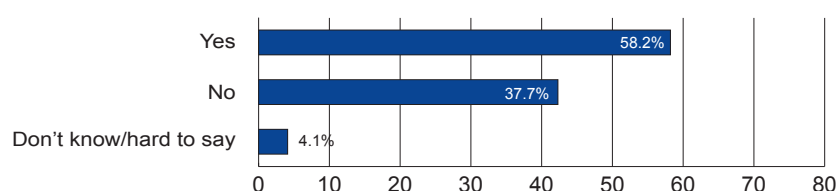
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2.3 Uptake of Work-Life Initiatives

Despite provision of work-life initiatives by many companies in Hong Kong, uptake of these initiatives is often lower than expected. In this survey, we asked respondents if they are currently using at least one type of the work-life initiatives listed, and if not, the reasons why they have not taken up any.

As shown in Figure 4, 58.2% of the respondents are using at least one type of work-life initiative listed above.

Figure 4: Are you currently using any work-life initiatives? (2012)



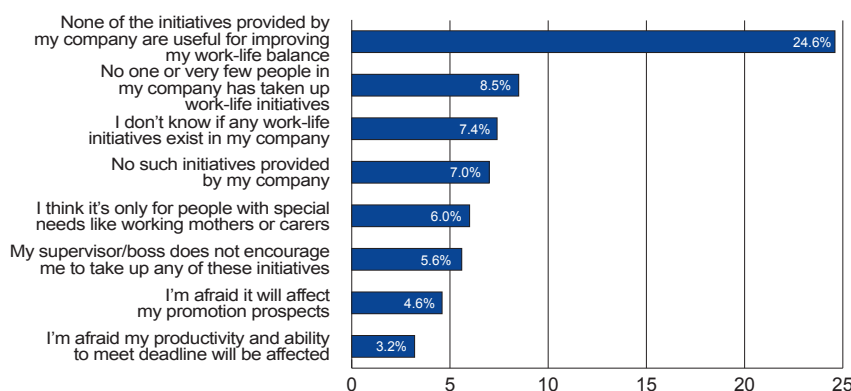
Demographic Variable	Key Findings
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The following industries have the highest percentage of employees using work-life initiatives: Film/Entertainment (100%); Oil, Energy, Resources and Utilities (100%); Law, Accountancy and Professional Information Services (77.4%); Manufacturing (69.7%); Information Technology (68.8%); Other Personal Services (68.0%).

Of those who want to but are currently not using any work-life initiatives, the top reasons stated are that (Figure 5):

- None of the initiatives provided by the employer are useful for improving work-life balance (24.6%)
- No one or very few people in the company has taken up work-life initiatives (8.5%)
- I don't know if any work-life initiatives exist in my company (7.4%)

Only 11.1% of respondents say they do not need to use work-life initiatives.


Figure 5: Reasons for Not Taking Up Work-Life Initiatives (2012)





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Demographic Variable	Key Findings			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The reasons for not using work-life initiatives differ by the type of company: 			
	Hong Kong/ Chinese companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None of the initiatives are useful My boss/supervisor does not encourage me to take up any initiatives Don't know if any work-life initiatives exist in my company 	International companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None of the initiatives are useful No initiatives provided No one or very few people have taken up any initiatives
	Government/ Public sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None of the initiatives are useful No one or very few people have taken up any initiatives Think it's only for people with special needs like working mothers/carers 	NGO/Charitable organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None of the initiatives are useful Afraid it will affect promotion prospects Don't know if any work-life initiatives exist in my company

4. WORK-LIFE CULTURE IN HONG KONG

Despite efforts from Community Business to encourage companies to address work-life balance as a strategic business issue, the work-life culture in Hong Kong remains one marked by “face time” and a fear of loss of competitiveness, as demonstrated by this year’s findings. Respondents were given six statements and asked to choose the two that most accurately describe the work-life culture in their organisations. More than half (61.1%) of the respondents chose statements that are indicative of a negative environment.

4.1 Work-Life Balance - a Sensitive Subject

Importantly, findings indicate that work-life balance has remained a sensitive subject in the Hong Kong workplace (Figure 6):

- 30.7% of the respondents say that work-life balance is simply not talked about in their company.
- 18.0% of respondents feel that they cannot raise concerns about work-life balance if they want to get ahead in their company.

4.2 Culture of Face Time

Community Business’ annual research *The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong Survey* has continually confirmed that working hours in Hong Kong are typically long and well above the 40 hours per week standard recommended by the International Labour Organisation. Over the years this has culminated into a prevalent culture of “face time” – where employees are assumed to be working if they are physically present in the office – the phenomenon also referred to as presenteeism. This year’s survey provided the following key findings that demonstrate the existence of this negative culture (Figure 6):

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



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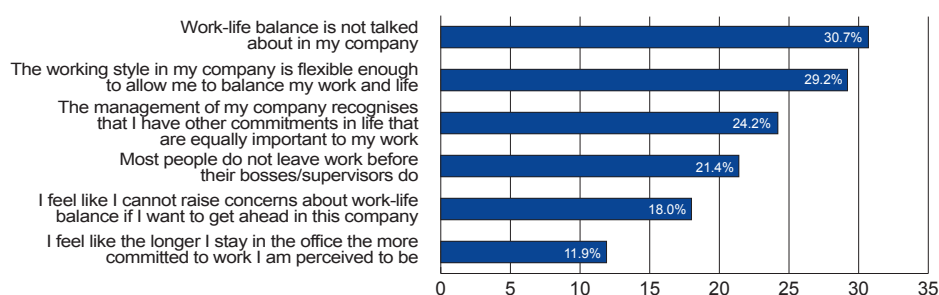


4.3 Supportive Culture in Some Hong Kong Companies

Despite the above, there are encouraging signs that the work-culture in a good number of companies in Hong Kong is supportive of work-life balance (Figure 6):

- 29.2% of respondents say the working style in their company is flexible enough to allow them to balance their work and life.
- 24.2% of respondents say the management of their company recognises that they have other commitments in life that are equally important to their work.

Figure 6: Which of the following statements most accurately describe the work culture in your company when it comes to work-life balance? (2012)



5. THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN SHAPING HONG KONG'S WORK-LIFE CULTURE

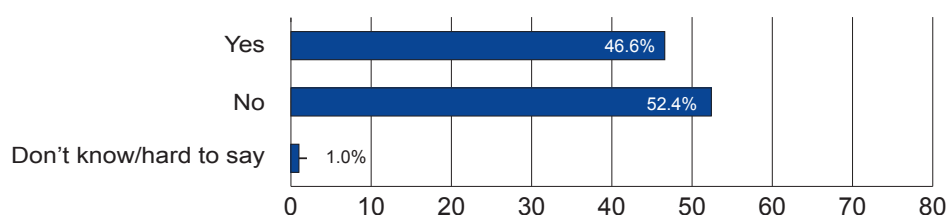
Mobile technology has increasingly been used by companies, especially those in global businesses, to expand the ability for work to be done anywhere and anytime. In this year's survey, we asked questions about the usage and impact of mobile technology has on employees' work-life balance.

5.1 Usage of mobile technology for work

Almost half of respondents (46.6%) use mobile technology or devices for work either after office hours or outside of the office (Figure 7).

A higher percentage of people in professional/managerial/executive positions, people earning higher levels of income and employees working in international companies say they use mobile technology for work.

Figure 7: Are you currently using any mobile technology for work after office hours or outside of the office? (2012)





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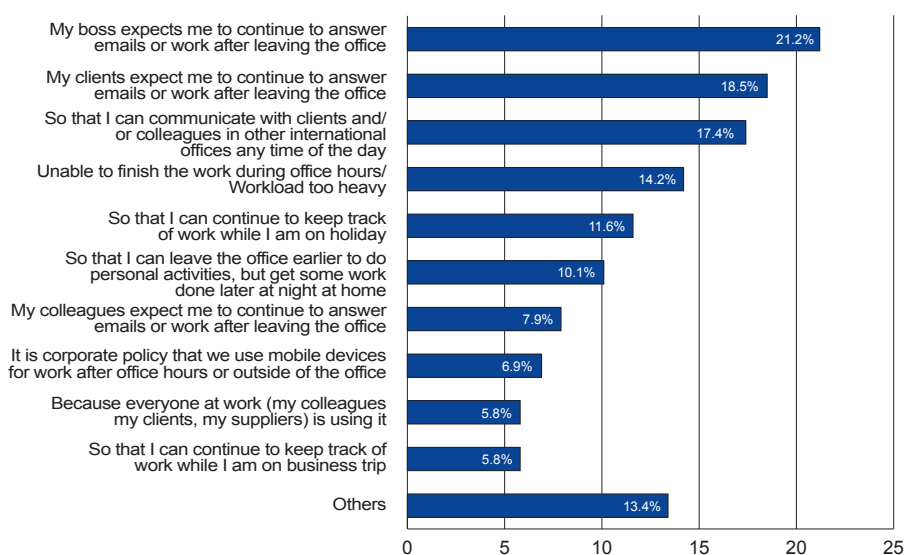
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For those who do use mobile technology or devices for work either after office-hours or outside of the office, the top reasons for doing so are (Figure 8):

- “My boss expects me to continue to answer emails or work after leaving the office” (21.2%)
- “My clients expect me to continue to answer emails or work after leaving the office” (18.5%)
- “So that I can communicate with clients and/or colleagues in other international offices any time of the day” (17.4%)

Figure 8: Do you use mobile technology or devices for work after office hours or outside of the office? If yes, what are the reasons? (2012)



5.2 Impact of mobile technology on work-life balance

In this survey, we gave respondents four statements regarding the impact of technology on work-life balance to choose from, including two positive statements and two negative statements. The results are that four in ten respondents (42.7%) think that the use of mobile technology or devices for work after office hours or outside of the office 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 – I cannot rest fully” (28.3%)
- “I am expected to check and respond to work emails and communications any time of the day” (14.4%).

Only 15.4% of the respondents think that technology has a positive impact on their overall work-life balance. Specifically because:

- “I can work more flexibly – both in terms of time and location” (11.2%)
- “I can leave the office earlier compared to if I do not have the mobile devices” (4.2%)

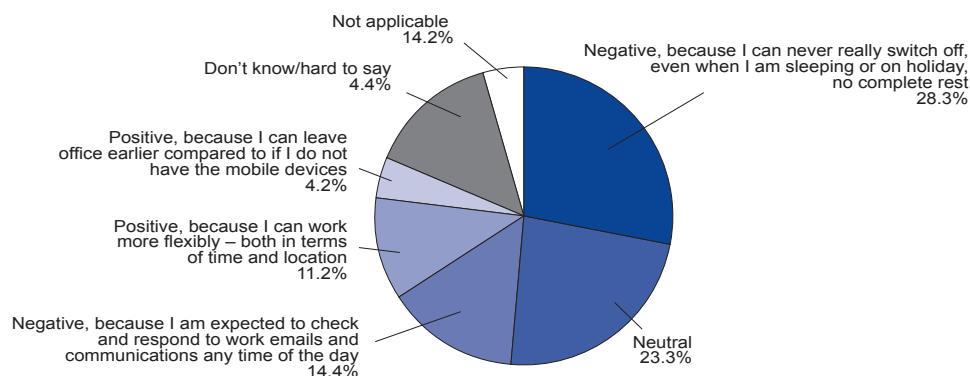
23.3% of respondents say that use of technology has had a neutral effect on their work-life balance.





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Figure 9: Do you think the use of mobile technology or devices for work outside of office hours or when you are outside of the office has a positive, negative or neutral effect on your overall work-life balance? (2012)



Demographic Variable	Key Findings
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of mobile technology for work has a greater negative impact on younger employees (15-30 and 31-40) because they can “never really switch off, even when they are sleeping or on holiday” (36.7% and 37.3%).
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of mobile technology affects more people who have received tertiary education – 31.2% find they can “never really switch off”; 20.2% say they are “expected to check and respond to emails any time of the day”.

6. THE IMPORTANCE OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE AS A STRATEGIC BUSINESS ISSUE – MOTIVATION, PRODUCTIVITY, RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF TALENT

Results from previous *State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong* surveys have consistently demonstrated that work-life balance is a key issue affecting productivity, quality of work, recruitment and retention, and employee well-being. This year's results continue to reinforce the business case for addressing work-life issues in the Hong Kong workplace.

Most respondents (71.8%) see work-life balance as a critical factor affecting motivation, productivity, recruitment and retention of talent.

Specifically in terms of motivation and productivity at work:

- 25.8% of employees say work-life balance is among the top 3 factors affecting their motivation and productivity at work.
- 24.1% of employees think that work-life balance is more important than money when they choose to join, stay with or leave a company.
- 21.9% of employees think that work-life balance is among the top 3 factors they consider when they choose to join, stay with or leave a company.

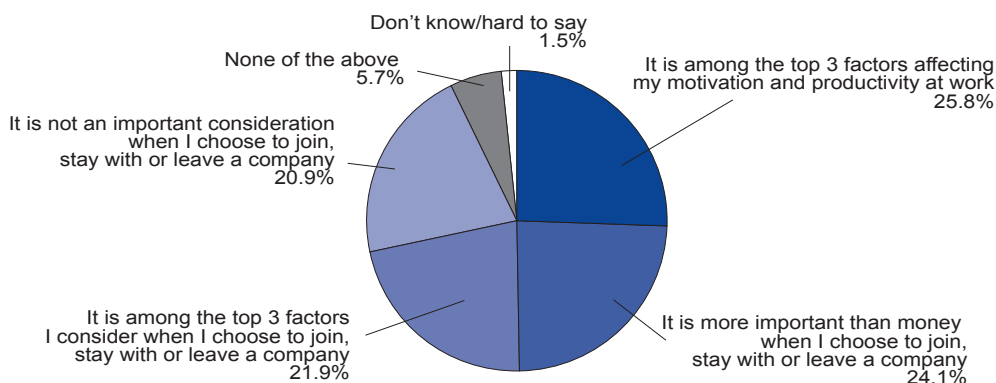
Only 20.9% of respondents say that work-life balance is not an important consideration when they choose to join, stay with or leave a company.





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Figure 10: Which of the following statements most accurately describes your view of work-life balance? (2012)



Demographic Variable	Key Findings
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work-life balance is more important for women as they consider to join, stay with or leave a company (24.7%). Another 24.7% say it is more important than money. On the other hand, 24.2% of men say it is not an important consideration for choice of employer.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More young employees (15-30) say work-life balance is among the top 3 factors affecting their motivation and productivity (38.0%). A higher percentage of older employees (41 to 50; 51 and above) say work-life balance is not an important consideration. Among all age groups, the largest percentage aged between 31-40 say work-life balance is among the top 3 factors affecting choice of employer (28.4%) and 27.1% say it is more important than money.

7. ESTABLISHING RESPONSIBILITY FOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Community Business' research *Driving Cultural Change to Achieve Work-Life Balance* (2011) highlighted that one of the biggest barriers to achieving work-life balance is the lack of understanding of where responsibility lies for achieving work-life balance. In this survey, we explored the top contributors to the current state of work-life balance in Hong Kong and examined who is responsible for improving work-life balance in organisations.

7.1 Contributors to the Current State of Work-Life Balance

When asked what have been the biggest contributors to the current state of work-life balance in Hong Kong, respondents cited the highly competitive nature of global/international business as the top contributor (23.9%) and Hong Kong's hard work ethic as the second biggest (22.6%). This is not surprising given Hong Kong's role as a global/international business centre and the belief that the key to Hong Kong's success is diligence, efficiency and a "can do" attitude, which for some people translates into long hours and heavy workload, leading to poor work-life balance.

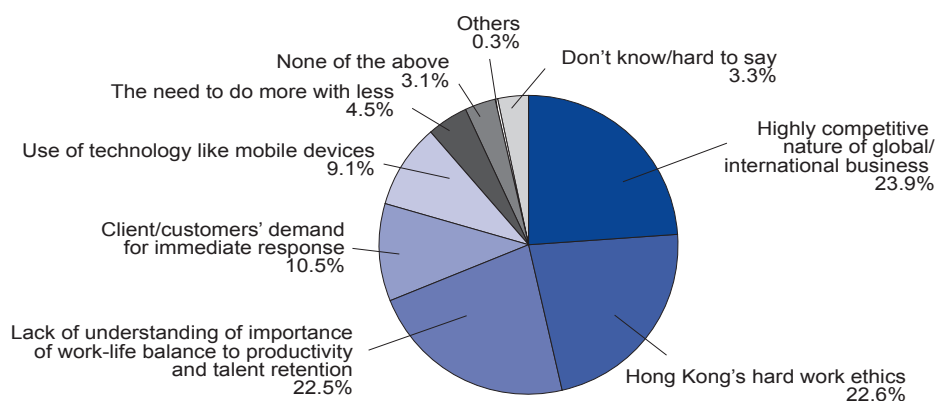
Importantly, lack of understanding of the importance of work-life balance to productivity and talent retention (22.5%) emerged as the third biggest contributor to the state of work-life balance in Hong Kong. This is a clear warning sign for employers and employees alike that gaining a thorough understanding of the importance of work-life balance as a strategic business issue is critical to the bottom line.




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Figure 11: What do you think has been the biggest contributor to the current state of work-life balance in Hong Kong? (2012)

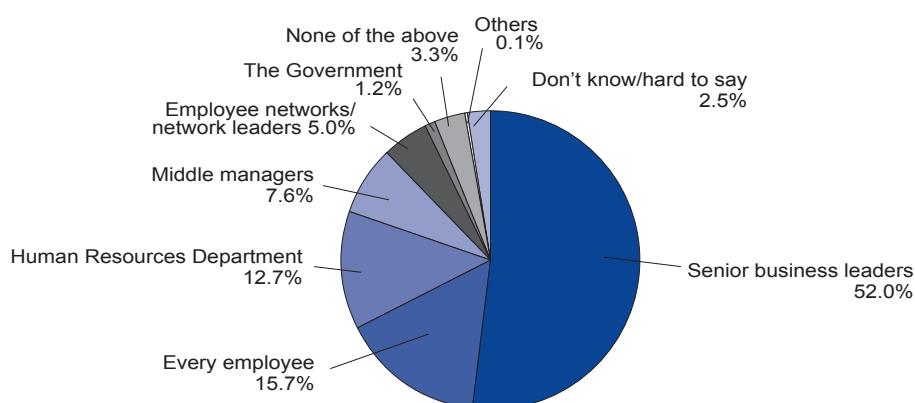


Demographic Variable	Key Findings
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A higher percentage of younger employees (15-30) cited “competitive nature of global businesses” (29.0%) and “lack of understanding of business case” for work-life balance (27.1%) as the key contributors to the current state of work-life balance.

7.2 Responsibility for Work-Life Balance

For employees in Hong Kong, the answer to the question “who do you think should take the primary responsibility for improving work-life balance in your organisation?” is overwhelmingly clear – “senior business leaders” (52.0%). Ranking in second place with a significant gap in percentage of response is “every employee” (15.7%), followed by the “Human Resources Department” (12.7%) (Figure 12).



Figure 12: Who do you think should take the primary responsibility for improving work-life balance in your organisation? (2012)





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Demographic Variable	Key Findings
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although a large percentage of younger employees say “senior business leaders” should bear primary responsibility for work-life balance in an organisation, more young employees (15 – 30) say that “every employee” (18.1%) and “middle managers” (9.5%) should take primary responsibility.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More employees in international companies say “senior business leaders” should bear the primary responsibility for improving work-life balance, whereas more employees in local/Chinese companies say the responsibility lies with the “Human Resources department”.

8. OBSERVATIONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

This year’s findings substantiated a number of Community Business’ important observations regarding work-life balance as a strategic business issue in Hong Kong. We highlight below our commentary on the key trends from this year’s findings and thoughts on the way forward.

8.1 There is a mismatch in work-life initiatives provided by employers and desired by employees – implementing flexibility will be key

Whilst flexible working time and working remotely/from home are among initiatives identified as most effective by employees for improving work-life balance, only 25% and 18.9% of respondents say these are offered in their organisations. Some employers in Hong Kong seem to have gone for the “easy wins” – initiatives like career breaks, unpaid leave, extra paid leave and work support services, whilst useful, are not necessarily strategic and may fail to tackle the crux of the issue – changing organisations’ work-life culture. Implementing flexible working arrangements could be the solution to this mismatch for many companies, and those that are able to embed flexibility into their working style will emerge as employers of choice for top talent in their respective industries.

8.2 The culture of “face time” remains pervasive – driving cultural change is critical

The findings shows that Hong Kong’s working environment is still characterised by “face time” or the need to be physically present at work to be perceived as committed. The fear of losing competitiveness still exists, as illustrated by the fact that work-life balance is simply not talked about in companies and employees see raising concerns about work-life balance as a threat to getting ahead. Community Business’ 2011 research, *Driving Cultural Change to Achieve Work-Life Balance* talks at length about how barriers to cultural shift can be overcome, in particular the importance of establishing responsibility for work-life balance, understanding the business case and implementing flexible work arrangements – which are also issues highlighted by the findings in this survey. Driving organisational cultural change and establishing a supportive work-life environment will be critical for real progress to take place.



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8.3 The business case for work-life balance is clear – but understanding is lacking

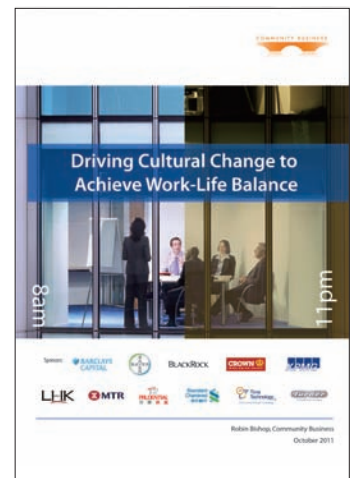
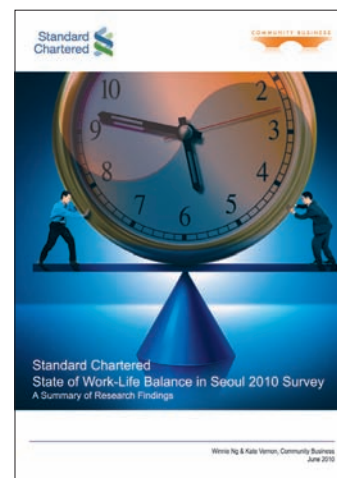
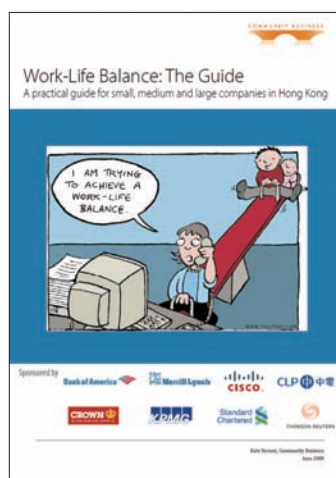
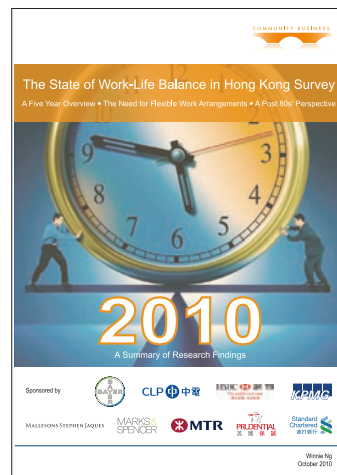
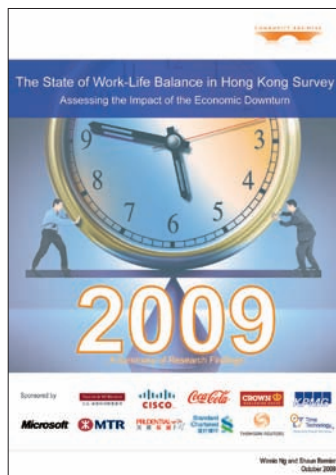
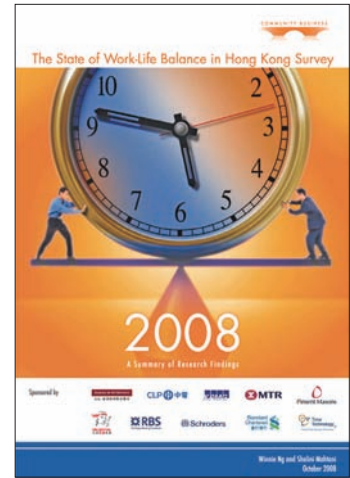
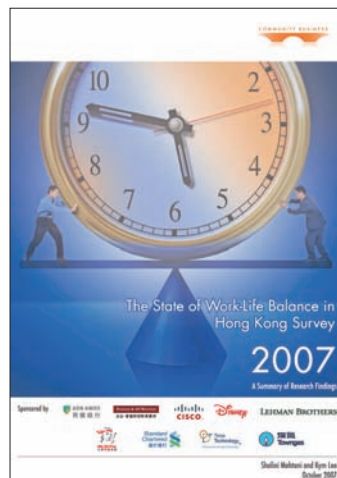
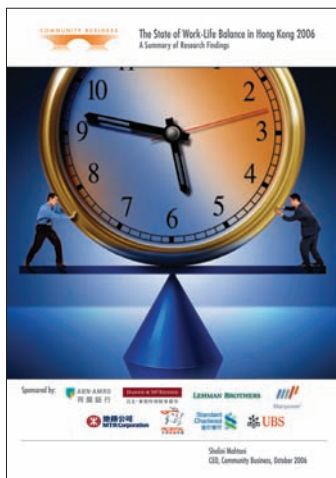
This year's findings, as in all our previous surveys, clearly demonstrates the existence of a strong business case for work-life balance. Employees have told us that work-life balance is pivotal to motivation and productivity and plays a key role in recruitment and retention of talent and one in four employees (24.1%) say that work-life balance is more important than money. On the other hand, lack of understanding of the business case is cited as one of the top 3 factors that contributes to the current state of work-life balance in Hong Kong. It is clear that more work needs to be done to increase understanding of the business case for work-life balance in organisations across Hong Kong.

8.4 Technology is a double-edged sword – mastering technology has become an essential skill

For an international financial and trade centre like Hong Kong, working beyond the "9 to 5" model is inevitable for many people. Many employees speak of a 24/7 environment which makes work-life balance unachievable. Whilst use of technology has greatly enhanced business' ability to operate across time zones, the findings show that technology has had a negative impact on employees' work-life balance. As a result, it has become increasingly important that employers and employees alike set boundaries and manage expectations around the use of devices like Blackberry and smartphones for work, both internally among managers and staff but also externally with suppliers and clients. Guidelines and training on appropriate and acceptable usage of mobile technologies will be essential to empower employees to manage technology wisely.

8.5 Senior business leaders must take the lead to act and engage employees in a two-way dialogue

As we have noted in our research *Driving Cultural Change to Achieve Work-Life Balance* (2011), establishing mutual responsibility for work-life balance between employers and employees is critical. Whilst many business leaders acknowledge the importance of work-life balance as a business issue, employees are still struggling to gain a sense of control over when, where and how they work. The missing link lies in committed leadership and engagement. An open and honest two-way dialogue between employers as represented by senior business leaders and employees is essential to establish joint accountability for improving work-life balance. The survey findings have given a strong call for action for senior business leaders to take the lead and be visible role models for championing work-life balance in their organisations, and take proactive steps to empower employees to take responsibility for their own work-life balance.



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