



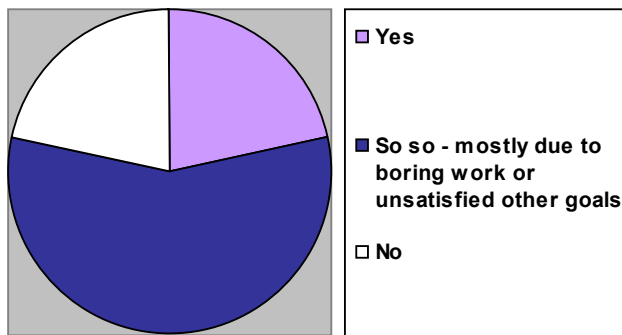
ThinkEvans Coffee Time Survey April 2005

“What is all the fuss about Work Life Balance?”

The aim of this survey was to get a feel for whether all the current talk about work-life balance rang true with a cross section of people by experience (aged teens to more than 70) and work type (full & part time, paid & voluntary, etc).

We asked respondents to consider whether they were individually satisfied with the balance they were experiencing (or not!) between work commitments and the rest of their life.

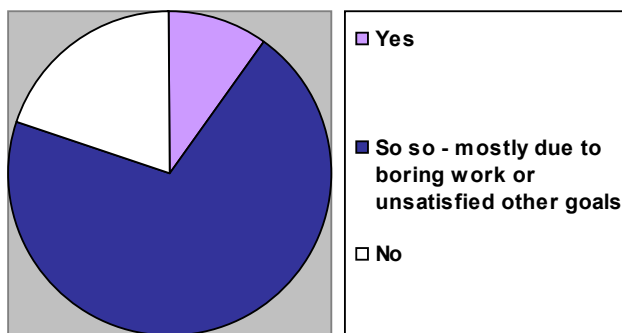
Self-assessment



As can be seen from the graph above, a majority took the “so so” view - principally due to work that was boring, or having other goals that they wished to fulfil, but no opportunity to do so due to work. The other respondents were split exactly evenly between yes and no!

It would be fair to say that there are no surprises here. Nor were there any in the assessments made by respondents of the situations of their

Assessment of work colleagues



work colleagues - see second graph - although most indicated that a “so so” assessment was based on their own observations of their colleagues, not an actual discussion.

That said, we found it very reassuring to have a reasonable number of respondents take a firm view that they were happy with the work-life balance that they were experiencing.

Comments offered in the open questions clearly acknowledged the need for an individual to make choices to improve their circumstances, but the risks involved in so doing.

When asked to nominate examples of work arrangement that really made a beneficial difference to the work-life balance, there were two runaway winners: **working from home** (typically a day a week or so), and having a reasonable attitude to **flexibility of start and finish times**.

There is a lot more to this than punctuality and responsibility of employees. The point of focus was the destructiveness of a work place culture that has everyone watching the clock to see what time colleagues leave, or waiting (without producing anything, oftentimes) until the boss leaves before feeling that they can go home for the day. This sort of thing was a clear loser when it comes to people being positive about their working circumstances and the balancing of this with other parts of their lives.

From the comments made by a majority of respondents, it is also a principal reason for leaving an employer - the clock watching is seen as typically being indicative of a lack of trust in the team, and a focus on form rather than substance in an individual’s contribution.

So feeling that the boss has a mental Bundy clock (are we showing our age here?) that marks the start and finish time for each member of the team is about as bad as it gets, and being confident that this is *not* the case is a very, very good foundation for a team satisfied with the balance between work and everything else.



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Working at home a day a week, or a day a fortnight, was equally popular as flexibility in start and finish times - and it was also nominated as being as much as a statement of maturity and trust amongst colleagues as anything else.

Not a few respondents indicated that they worked more under such arrangements, but felt happier with the balance because of the flexibility afforded them - and not to mention the luxury of working in the dreaded “trackie dacks” when the day outside was cold and miserable!

There were a variety of interesting comments about the value of treating employees as adults, and trusting them to produce outcomes rather than just “occupy the crease” for the required hours.

We note also the winning status of self-employment in terms of work-life balance, despite some of the draw backs. It is certainly not the ultimate answer for everyone, but it certainly seems to work for a good few people.

A few “quotable quotes” from respondents:

- “Self employment permits you to regulate your own work life balance. Sounds really simple but in fact it presents you (the employee) the opportunity to work less than you (the business owner) would prefer. After you have your first argument, with yourself, you realise that you are your own worst enemy. Work life balance is about you taking choices that provide sufficient latitude for balance. Work ethos and professional values cloud your ability to retain your power.”
- “Nothing has worked better than operating my own business, from home. Perfect balance of work and home, with perhaps the minor exception of loss to social life that exists in a workplace.”
- “Working from home one day a week is hard to beat for those with care responsibilities, whether children or aging parents or even disabled siblings.”

- “Having autonomy to get the work done (rather than the 'face time' approach which is very common in law firms) was a benefit to me and came from working in smaller firms - the occasional Sunday morning at the office was not ideal, but was not too bad compared to the average weekly hours within a schedule I could make for myself and still meet partners and clients' needs and demands.”
- “Taking up a hobby that forced me to leave the office at a set time multiple times per week.”
- “I would love to see you do a survey on business ethics in this area - with the creep of so-called executive contracts down the chain to a much broader range of managers and supervisors, it would be interesting to see what the effective hourly rate is for a lot of very over-worked professionals.”

The last comment above raises a very interesting point, and one that sat alongside the feedback that we received about future survey topics. Business ethics is about the hottest topic in town, it would seem - at least amongst the respondents to this survey!

Just as an aside - we really liked the hobby comment - it is a simple path to time discipline as well as more of a life than just work.

The opinions expressed in this analysis are those of the author and may not reflect the interpretation of any other person or entity.

Summary by Carolyn Evans, May 2005

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