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## **Australian Institute of Management – Western Australia**

### **Survey on Work & Personal Life Balance**

#### **Introduction**

An electronic survey was conducted in September 2005 with Personal Members of the Australian Institute of Management in Western Australia (AIM). The survey was aimed at exploring the issues of the balance between work and personal life.

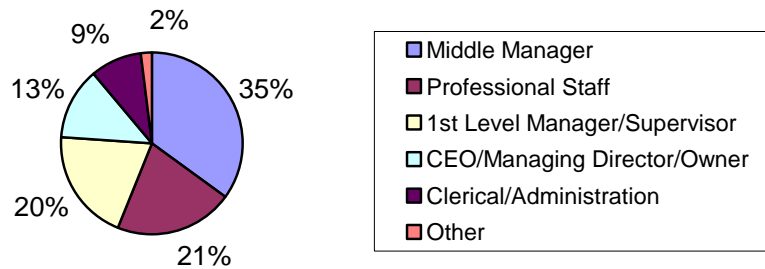
The findings of this survey reinforce the perceived importance of balance in one's life between both work and personal aspects of one's life to enable greater success to be achieved in every area of life – including professional matters. With an aging population and changes in perceived company commitment and loyalty, *Work and Personal Life* balance is a real issue for employers and employees alike.

AIM would like to thank the respondents who took the time to complete the survey and thereby increase our collective knowledge of the issues concerning the challenges for people to balance their work and personal lives.

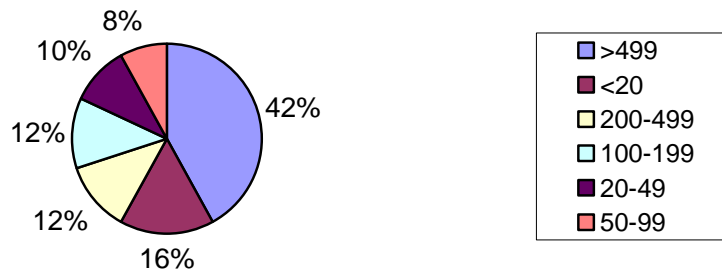
## The Survey Sample

The sample consisted of Personal Members of the Australian Institute of Management WA who were sent an electronic questionnaire via email. 958 Members, representing a response rate of 13%, responded to the survey. The sample's characteristics are shown in the tables below.

### Current Position



### No of Employees in Organisation



### Business Sector



### Comment on the Sample

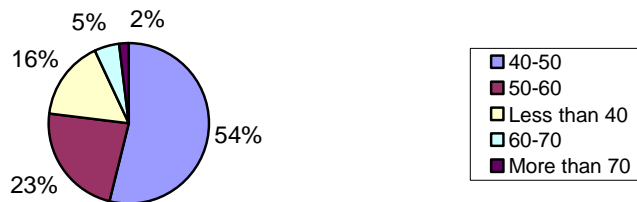
The sample is not strictly representative of the WA business community at large which typically has a larger proportion of people employed in organisations of 20 or less employees. Similarly the number of people who indicated they were in senior roles exceeds the numbers found in the general business community. The results should be considered in the light of this skewed sample.

## Section 1: Hours Worked

### *In your current job, in a typical week, how many hours do you work?*

As the chart below shows, five out of six of the sample work 40 or more hours, with only 16% currently work less than this amount in a typical week. Almost one-third of respondents (30%) work 50 or more hours.

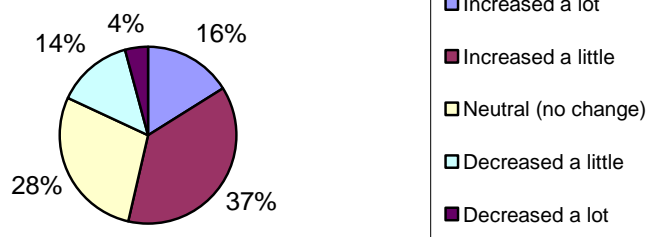
**Current Weekly Hours Worked**



### *Over the past 1-3 years, have your average weekly working hours increased or decreased?*

Over half of all respondents (53%) reported having seen their average working hours per week increase in the previous 1-3 years. Conversely, fewer than one in five (18%) have experienced a decrease in their hours, but more (28%) have seen no change.

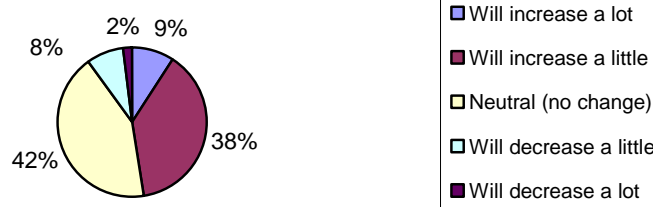
**Seen Weekly Hours Increase or Decrease?**



### *In the next 1-3 years, do you expect your average weekly working hours to increase or decrease?*

Almost one-half of the sample (47%) indicated that they expect their average weekly working hours to increase, with one in five of these expecting this increase to be quite marked (representing 9% of the overall sample expecting their hours to increase a lot). Conversely, only a minority (10%) expected their working hours to decrease in the foreseeable future.

**Expect Hours in Future to Increase or Decrease?**

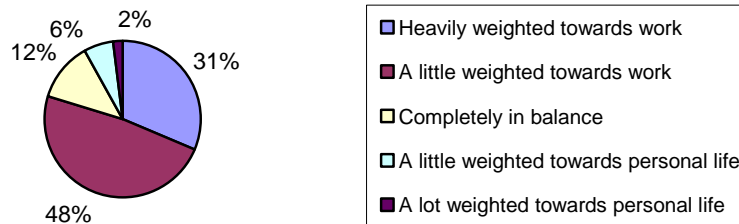


## Section 2: Self-Perceptions of Balance Being Achieved

### At this current time, how "balanced" do you regard your work vs personal life?

Four out of five respondents (79%) believe their lives are more balanced towards work rather than to their personal life, either to a great or lesser extent. Only 12% of the sample regard their lives as completely in balance, with fewer again (8%) believing their lives are weighted towards the personal side.

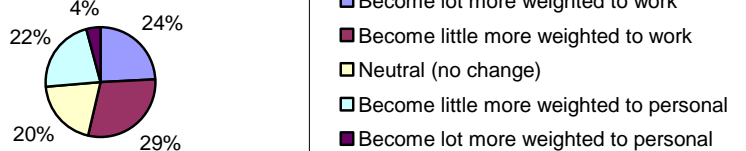
How "Balanced" is your work/personal life?



### Over the past 1-3 years, how has your work/life balance changed?

Over one-half (53%) of respondents recently believe their lives are now more weighted towards work. However, one-quarter (26%) perceive this balance has become more oriented towards personal matters, albeit that this hasn't been a seismic shift. It would therefore appear that, despite most respondents seeing the scales of their current lives tipped towards work, for some at least balance in their life has actually become more geared towards personal issues compared to how it used to be.

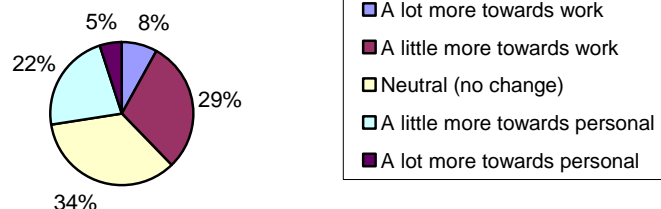
Perceived Change in Balance in Last 1-3 Years



### In the next 1-3 years, how do you anticipate your work/life balance might change?

Whilst more than one-third of respondents (37%) anticipate their lives might become more weighted towards work in the foreseeable future, a slightly smaller proportion (27%) expect the opposite. Another one-third (34%) expect there will be no change to their work/life balance.

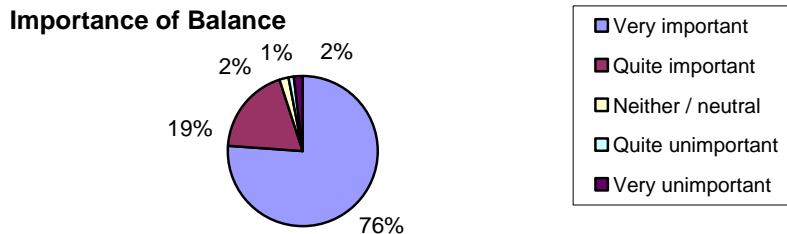
Expected Change in Balance in next 1-3 Years



### Section 3: Importance of Balance

#### *How important is it for you to feel you have adequate work/life balance?*

Perhaps not surprisingly, almost all respondents perceive achieving balance between their work and home life as important, to a greater or lesser extent.



#### *Please expand a little on the answer you just gave to the previous question.*

In relation to why people thought it important to have a balanced work and personal life, the sample presented an interesting array of viewpoints, although a number of themes seemed to commonly recur. A good number of respondents openly articulated a knowledge that they needed to, and a desire that they wanted to, become a lot better at managing balance in their lives, with some voicing outright fear about the medium to long term impact on themselves and their families if they did not curtail the present imbalance.

*“The area that loses out is my “me” time”.*

Doubt about the sustainability of long-term imbalance was clearly not far from the surface in the minds of at least some respondents, although respondents freely rationalised about their reasons for currently working so hard.

*“At this point in time I serve the organisation with the majority of my time in order to give my family a good standard of living and a decent home. If my working life continues as it is, I will not be sharing life with my family at all. What is the point of working?”*

Not surprisingly, respondents voiced a strong belief in the importance of family compared to work, with family being irreplaceable and forever.

*“Time invested with family is never lost”.*

Moreover, some respondents were critical of what they saw as a present lack of loyalty from companies – a situation they believed only compounded their own need to remain focused on personal life:

*“The days of company loyalty being a two way street seem to have passed. While maintaining a professional approach and enjoying work is important, when there is so little integrity displayed by management, it becomes necessary to evaluate one’s role and recognise where the real gains in life are”.*

A reduction in organisational support structures such as cover for annual leave and general staff levels were voiced by some as indications of increased expectations from employers which only exacerbated the situation, according to some of the sample. Other respondents, however, reported on themselves as a driving force pushing for high standards at work.

*"It's hard to pack up and leave some days".*

On the whole, respondents tended to either focus on the benefits derived from achieving balance in their lives, such as increased productivity and effectiveness, and enhanced decision making at work, as well as greater quality in all facets of life.

*"Without adequate balance between work and one's personal life, it is impossible to achieve an overwhelming sense of personal accomplishment".*

Others articulated the negative effects that a lack of balance can have such as decreased productivity and efficiencies at work ("burnout" was a commonly used term), and ultimately a lack of worth in, or point to, life itself. A re-evaluation of the comparative value of work versus personal life was commonly cited by respondents, and seemed to be either just a function of time and maturity, or in some cases precipitated by a specific catalyst such as redundancy or family trauma, breakdown or loss.

*"I'm finally waking up and trying to devote a little more time and energy to my family".*

*"I have traditionally placed work priorities above those of home and family. The folly of this approach is now self evident".*

Other respondents indicated a desire to more balance between work and non-working life as they approached retirement, in preparation for the impending change in their daily lives that this would represent.

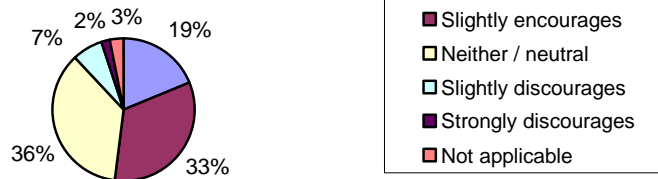
*"I don't want to go to retirement and feel empty, having nothing to look for".*

## Section 4: Organisation's Assistance to Achieving Balance

### *Does your organisation encourage you to achieve a work/life balance?*

Over half of the sample (52%) reported having organisations that encourage work/life balance, although another way of looking at the results is that only one in five (19%) work for organisations that strongly encourage this balance.

Does organisation encourage balance?



### *What strategies does your organisation utilise to assist you achieve a work/life balance?*

A minority of organisations appeared to employ no strategies whatsoever to assist their staff to achieve adequate work/life balance, whilst other respondents reported on lip service only from employers to this issue, with hinderances including the "guilt factor", ineffective IT systems, and predominantly a lack of human resource support.

*"In theory they encourage us. In practice there is no one there to fill in, so it's one step forward, two steps back".*

In other cases, the organisational culture was perceived to be the barrier, with only superficial belief in the merits of a balanced life for employees.

For the remaining majority, however, the following indicate the types of initiatives that are being used:

- Carers leave, flexible hours, part-time work, job-sharing,
- Time in lieu, enforced taking of leave entitlements
- Social events for families too
- Access to naturopath, medical checks, anonymous counselling
- Subsidised sport and other interests
- Wellness programs and lifestyle seminars
- Provision of laptops to work from home/virtual offices
- Timeout areas, on-site yoga, pilates, physical exercise
- Lower salary over 4 years, to take 5<sup>th</sup> year off for professional development
- Purchasing of additional leave
- Retirement seminars

***What additional strategies could your organisation utilise to assist you achieve work/life balance?***

The strategies listed in the previous question were also given as potential strategies by respondents whose organisations currently do not utilise them, with the following types of suggestions also added or being commonplace:

- Increasing staff numbers
- Improving an organisation's culture (not just paying lip service)
- Providing a crèche
- Encouraging community work

**Section 5: Self-Assistance to Achieving Balance**

***Please explain briefly how you try to achieve a work/life balance for yourself?***

From a personal point of view, respondents endeavour to utilise a number of strategies to ensure good balance for themselves, including the following:

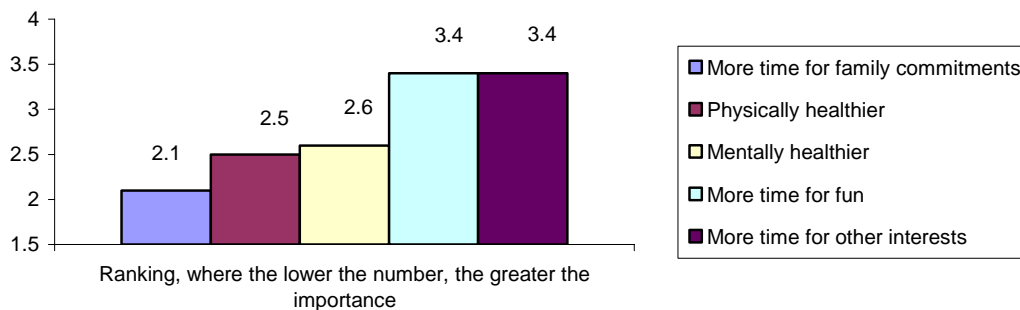
- Self-discipline: time management, delegation and prioritisation skills
- Attitudinal: Learn to switch off (meditation, etc)
- Minimise out of work hours, and not take work home
- Use a laptop
- Have a personal/business/life coach
- Regular family/partner time
- Regular exercise and good diet
- Frequent short breaks/holidays

## Section 6: Benefits of, and Barriers to, Balance

*Please rank the following personal benefits of a work/life balance in terms of their importance to you (from 1: most important to 5: least important).*

The chart below shows the ranking that respondents gave to a selection of possible personal benefits from achieving a balance between work and home life. For the sample as a whole, family commitments are seen to be the most important benefit to be derived from having an adequate balance, (as denoted by the column with the lowest number on the chart below). The chart shows the suggested benefits, from most important to least important.

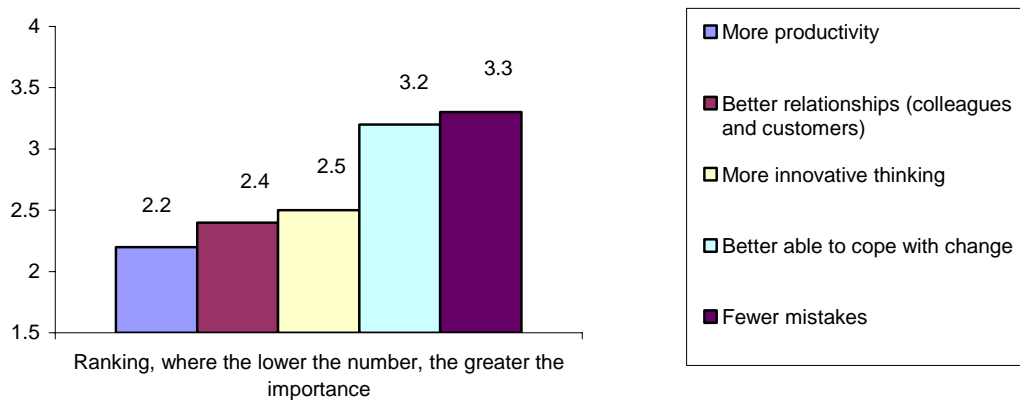
**Ranking of Relative Importance of Selected Personal Benefits of Work/Life Balance**  
(from 1 = most important to 5 = least important)



*Please rank the following benefits of a work/life balance in terms of their importance to you doing your job (from 1: most important to 5: least important).*

Looking at the importance of job-related benefits emanating from a balanced life, respondents indicated that, from the specific suggestions given to them to choose from, increased productivity rated as the most important benefit across the sample (as denoted by the lowest rating on the chart below). The chart shows the suggested benefits, from most important to least important.

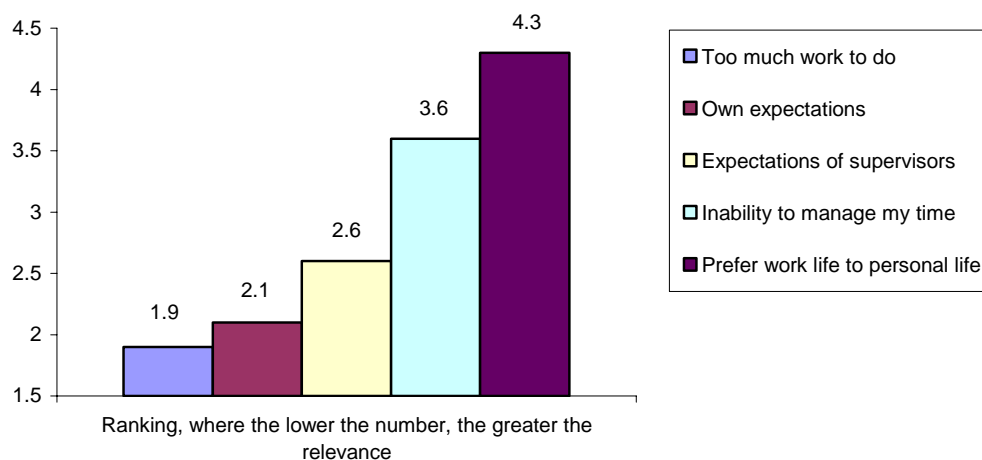
**Ranking of Relative Importance of Selected Benefits of Work/Life Balance in terms of Doing Job**  
(from 1 = most important to 5 = least important)



***And now please rank the following barriers to achieving a good work/life balance in terms of their relevance to you (from 1: most relevant to 5: least relevant).***

Other AIM research has indicated the widespread nature amongst Members of perceptions of having too much work to do, and this research again asserts this, with it being the most relevant barrier to achieving a good work/life balance, as an average ranking across respondents, and again from a selection of five possible barriers listed. Interestingly, this chart would appear to indicate that respondents perceive their own expectations as a more relevant barrier to gaining balance than the expectations of their bosses!

**Ranking of Relative Relevance of Selected Barriers to Achieving Work/Life Balance (from 1 = most relevant to 5 = least relevant)**



***In what areas within the work/life balance arena would you like to see further research conducted?***

A wide variety of topics were suggested as areas for further research aligned to the subject matter, including the following:

- The aging population, including corporate culture to keeping older workers
- Managing time outside work hours
- Cost/benefit of working 50+ hours
- FBT-exempt childcare
- Unstated culture of workplace versus stated culture by management on behaviour
- Do changing technologies help or hinder free time (especially emails)
- Societal changes over past 40 years
- Reward to effort relationship
- Impact of changing family structure
- Health versus work
- Extra-hours commitments by position and industry
- Family breakdown by position
- Life stage changes/priorities and their impact on employees' changing contributions to organisations

## Summary

One only has to look at the broad media recently to see that the subject of work/life balance is of widespread interest to both the general and the business communities alike, and AIM's survey reiterates this level of interest, as judged by both the strong response rate and by the wealth of material provided to the questions posed.

It is somewhat intuitive that people have high expectations of themselves in their work lives, but this research indicates that the relevance of self-expectations as a barrier to achieving a good work/life balance is indeed ranked greater than expectations of bosses and supervisors. With more than half of the sample indicating that they work in organisations that encourage staff to achieve a balance, it would appear that as much benefit can be derived from encouraging the achievement of "balance" into an individual's psyche as that of a corporate culture.

Not surprisingly, the research showed that there is almost universal agreement to the importance of adequate work/life balance, but having paid verbal credit to that credo, the survey appears to indicate that this balance somewhat eludes the majority of the sample. Four out of five respondents perceive a greater weighting towards work.

However, on a positive note to this social subject, respondents of the survey did indicate that there are acutely aware of different strategies they could adopt to ensure a greater life balance for themselves, even if they do not have the capacity to employ them in their present lives. Perhaps a commitment to oneself is the first step in achieving the desired greater work/life balance.

For further information on this survey and other AIM research,  
call the Institute on ph 61 8 9383 8088

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