

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Julie Cohen Coaching, LLC, in conjunction with Researchscape International, conducted an online survey of 315 workers and 90 human resource professionals across the U.S. to understand the differences between how each regards work-life balance. Fundamental differences between the two groups' perspectives have led to HR teams often investing for retention in the wrong areas.

KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

- 31% of workers left their last job to seek better work-life balance or will leave their current job for this reason.
- Key reasons individuals leave jobs are to pursue advancement (39%), to seek a higher salary (30%), or to improve work-life balance (20%), yet HR professionals regard the top areas to invest in improving retention to be organizational culture (75%), skills development (71%), and leadership development (68%).
- Almost one third (29%) of workers are not at all satisfied or are only slightly satisfied with their work-life balance.
- The biggest drivers of satisfaction with work-life balance are taking care of oneself outside of work, pursuing hobbies, and preserving boundaries between work and home life. HR pros view this through a work lens, seeing the most important areas as health insurance, culture, and the ability to take time off.
- Dissatisfaction with work-life balance is widespread. It is not just a mothers' issue, a working parents' issue, a women's issue or a generational issue.

WHAT WORK-LIFE BALANCE IS

For both employees and human-resource professionals, *work-life balance* means different things to different people, including making guilt-free choices, managing energy and satisfaction, and mastering time management.

Representative quotes about guilt-free choices:

- "Work-life balance to me means not feeling guilty when I spend time in one area at the expense of another. I spend more time on others, both at work and at home, than I do on myself." – Employee
- "That essentially I can give equal weight and importance to all spheres of my life recognizing that I may borrow time from one sphere when it's needed in another without obsession or guilt." – Employee
- "Not feeling guilty about the time I spend on one vs. the other." – HR professional

On managing energy and satisfaction:

- "Work and life are balanced when work is personally energizing in a way that actually brings energy into my personal life. Rather than feeling depleted by work, my personal time and life draw on the energy and satisfaction of the work." – Employee
- "It means that I find my balance to be acceptable for me. It constantly changes. At times, I am quite happy spending more time and energy at work; at other times, I am quite happy spending more time on other areas of my life." – HR professional
- "The ability to pursue activities that are validating and energizing." - Employee

On mastering time management:

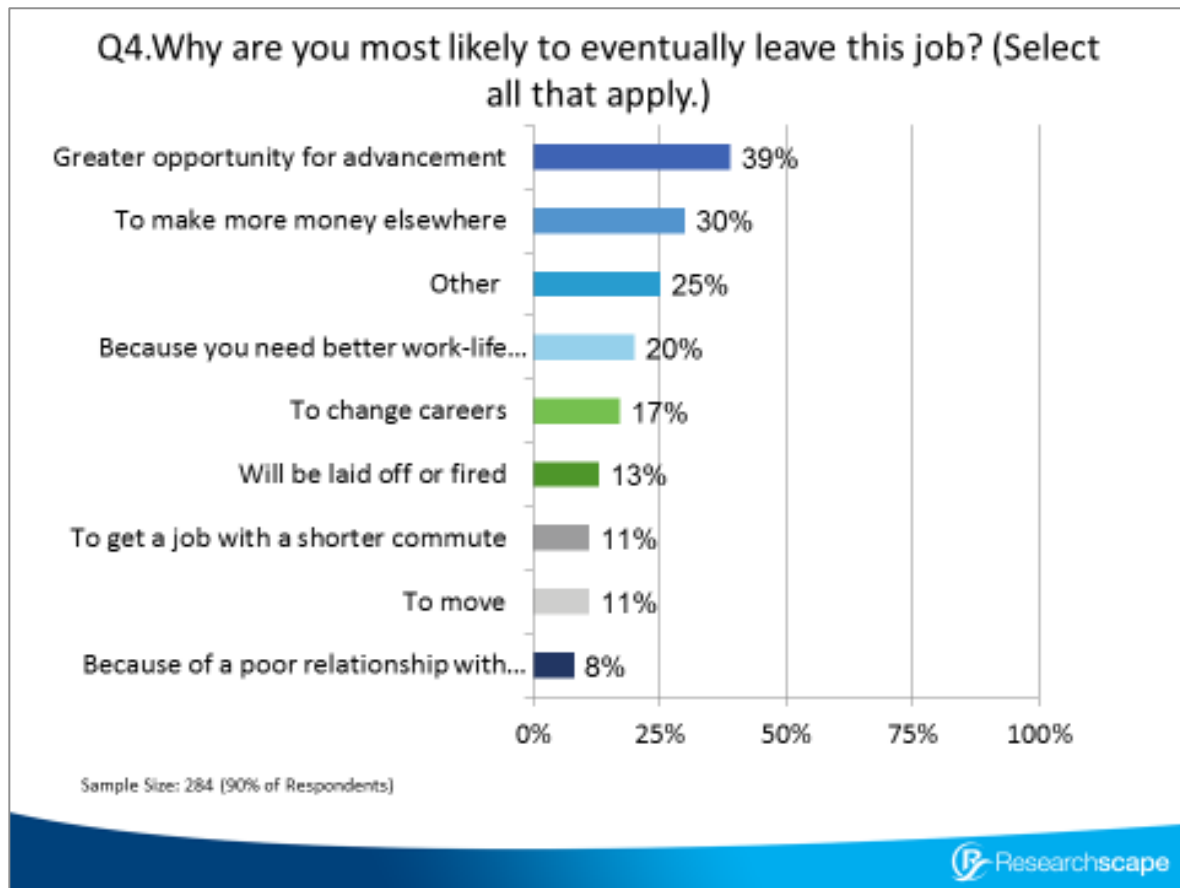
- "More time to pursue non-work related activities (like cleaning and finances) and to spend more time with friends/family." – Employee
- "Quantity of hours to spend not working vs working, good administration of time and work, good environment to work in, possibility to complement work time with free time, stress free-quality free time." – HR professional

When HR professionals talk about their own work-life balance, they often share the same feelings as other employees. But when it comes to addressing this issue as a professional, that all seems to be lost, because we see a difference between what HR professionals are doing programmatically and what individuals are seeking. HR professionals abstract these issues when applying them across their organizations, and in doing so they often get the priorities wrong.

Given that the responses to this question of what is work-life balance are very diverse and nuanced, it is hard to design one policy and program that meets the needs of everyone—or even the needs of a majority.

Yet employees often seek new jobs because they need greater work-life balance. It is one of the three most common reasons that professionals will seek another job, cited by 20%

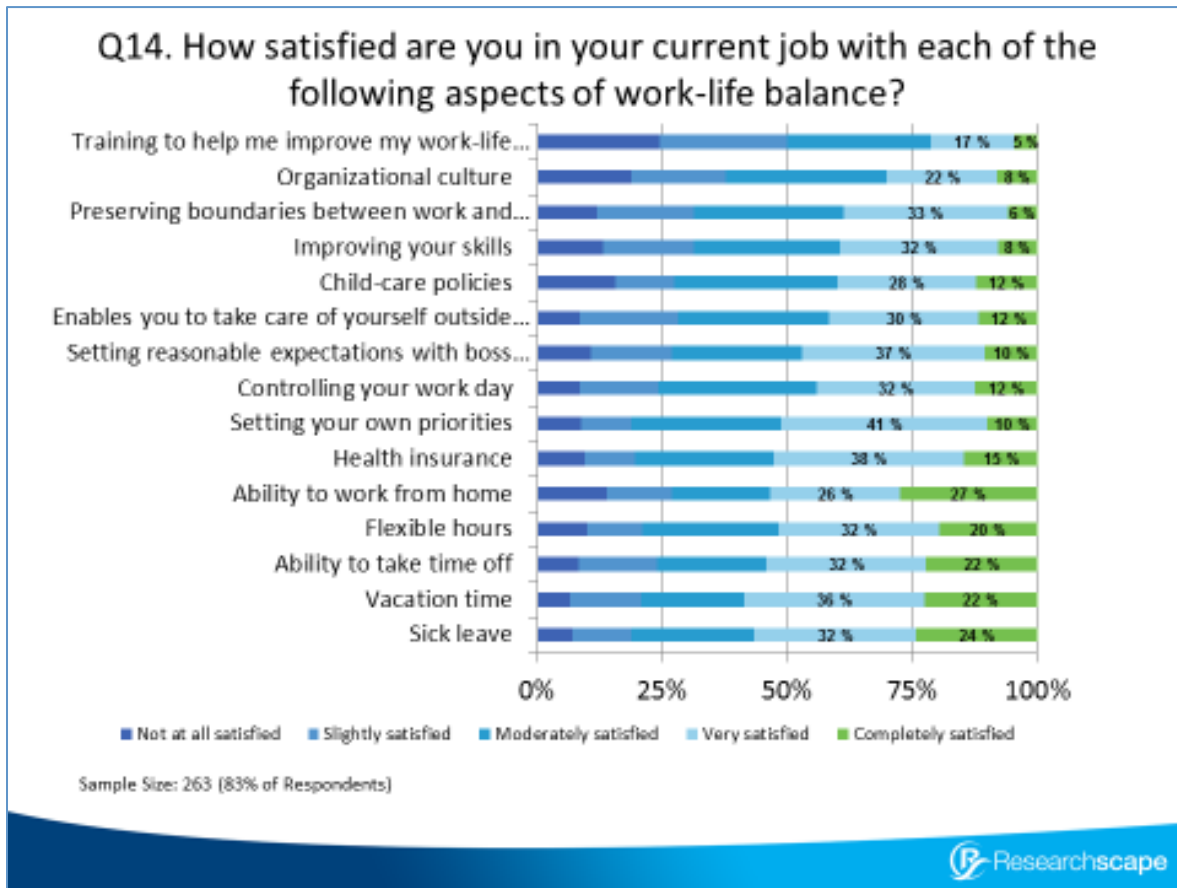
of respondents. The other two most common reasons: seeking greater opportunities for advancement (39%) and the ability to make more money elsewhere (30%).



In contrast, HR staff regard the top areas to invest in for improving retention to be organizational culture (75%), skills development (71%), and leadership development (68%). While these are important drivers of satisfaction with work-life balance for employees, they do not make the top 10 drivers, as the next section shows.

DRIVERS OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Areas where employee respondents were most likely to be completely satisfied with their work-life balance were the ability to work from home (27% completely satisfied), sick leave (24%), vacation time (22%), and ability to take time off (22%), and flexible hours (20%).



Researchscape correlated each employee's work-life satisfaction to their satisfaction with 15 different elements of work-life balance. The three biggest drivers of satisfaction with work-life balance were: taking care of yourself outside of work, pursuing hobbies and interests, and preserving boundaries between work and home life.

Here are the top 10 attributes that drive satisfaction with work-life balance:

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Attribute</i>	<i>Effect Size</i>
1	Enables you to take care of yourself outside of work	0.733
2	Your ability to pursue your hobbies/interests	0.692
3	Preserving boundaries between work and home life	0.663
4	Satisfaction with your stress level	0.649
5	Your time with family	0.629
6	Ability to take time off	0.599
7	Controlling your work day	0.563
8	Setting reasonable expectations with boss (and others)	0.556
9	Your time with friends	0.552
10	Flexible hours	0.519

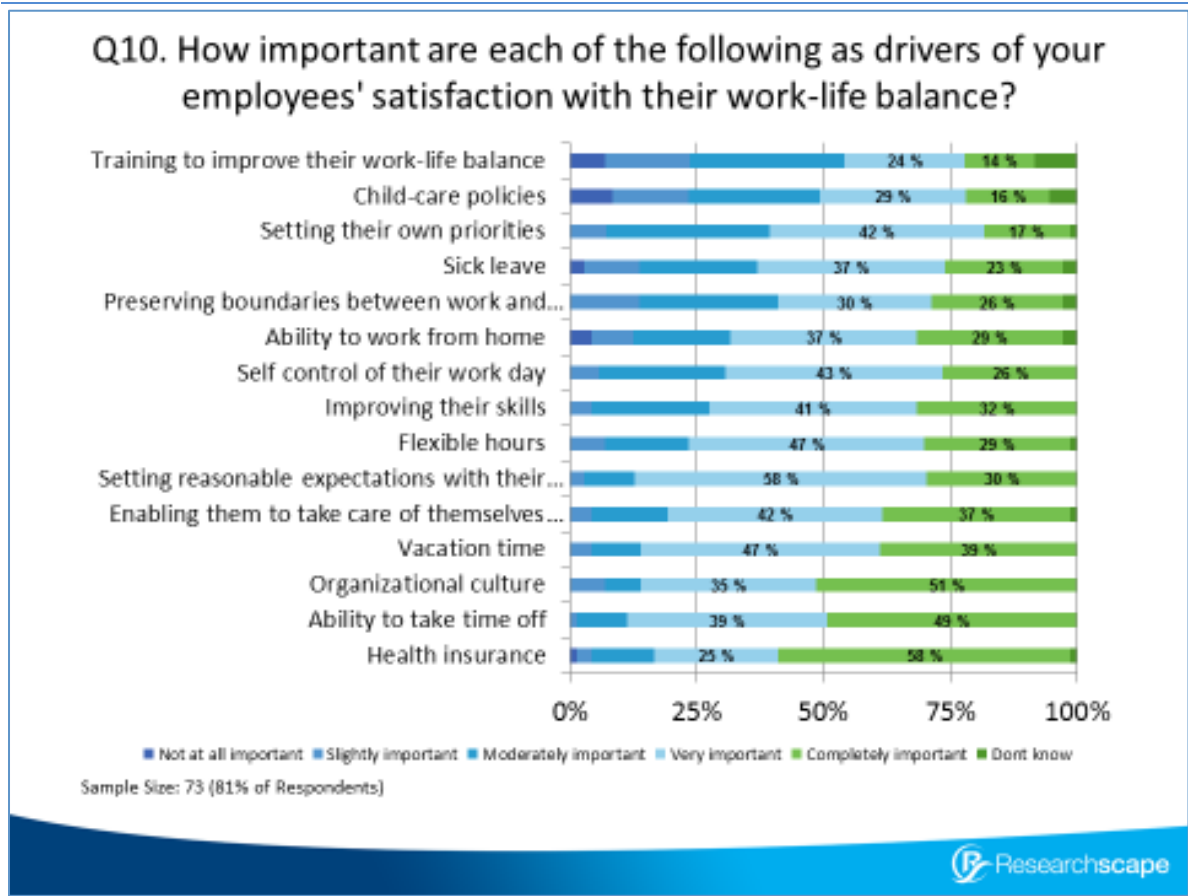
(The effect size calculation used Pearson's r.)

Preserving boundaries between work and home life is increasingly difficult for professional workers, who are expected to answer the phone, and monitor and respond to email and text messages 24/7. Sample comments from employees about what work-life balance means in the Internet age:

- "Being productive at work and not having to bring it home - being able to be with family and friends on days off and not have work responsibilities, expectations or intrusions (calls/emails/paperwork) constantly interfere."
- "It means being able to 'turn off' (phone/email/mentally) when I'm not at work. It means being able to be 'off the clock' after I've put in an 8 hour workday. It means being able to spend time on things totally unrelated to the workplace, including family, hobbies, friends, relaxing, etc."
- "The amount of time and energy allocated to work-related tasks (including e-mail, work-at-home, texting/phone calls) and personal life (family, friends, nonprofit activities outside of work, entertainment, relaxation)."

An HR professional addresses the bigger picture: "Balance is misleading - I don't know that we should try to balance work and life. I think we should define our personal and professional priorities and ensure that we are holding ourselves accountable by setting boundaries to protect them, living in each space to the fullest."

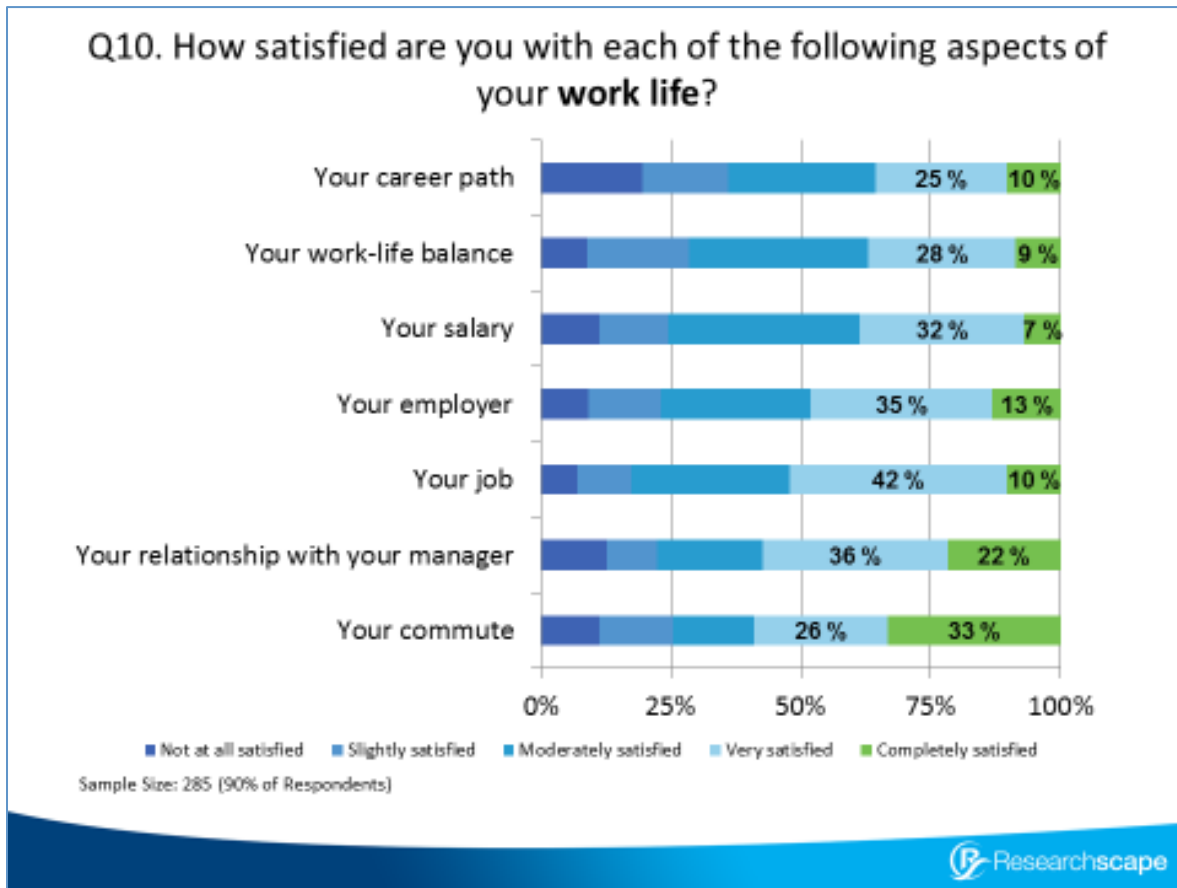
Stress level was listed as fourth most important attribute among employees in terms of satisfaction with work-life balance. Employees are in fact stressed over their stress level: 50% are either not satisfied at all or slightly satisfied with their stress level. Only 4% are completely satisfied.



HR professionals, in contrast, regard the three most important drivers of satisfaction with work-life balance as health insurance (completely important to 58% of HR pros, yet not one of the top ten drivers for employees), organizational culture (51% of HR professionals, not a top-ten factor to employees) and the ability to take time off (49% for HR vs. sixth in importance to employees).

DISSATISFACTION WITH WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Employees are most often completely satisfied with their commute (33%), and their relationship with their manager (22%), and their employer (13%). They are much less likely to be completely satisfied with their work-life balance (9%), which was next to last in complete satisfaction, beating out only salary (7%).



Almost a third (29%) of workers are not at all satisfied or only slightly satisfied with their work-life balance. By this measure, employees score only career path worse: 36% are not at all satisfied or are slightly satisfied with their career path.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE IS NOT JUST A MOTHER'S ISSUE

Dissatisfaction with work-life balance is widespread. It is not just a mothers' issue, or a parents' issue, or a woman's issue, or a generational issue. Work-life balance dissatisfaction does not vary in statistically significant ways by age, gender, marital status, or parenting status.

The only difference by demographics, and it is a minor one, is that satisfaction with child-care policies is subtly inversely correlated with the number of children: the more children in the house, the greater the dissatisfaction. More children also leads to less satisfaction with time spent with friends and less satisfaction with health insurance.

GREATER RETENTION PROBLEMS LOOM

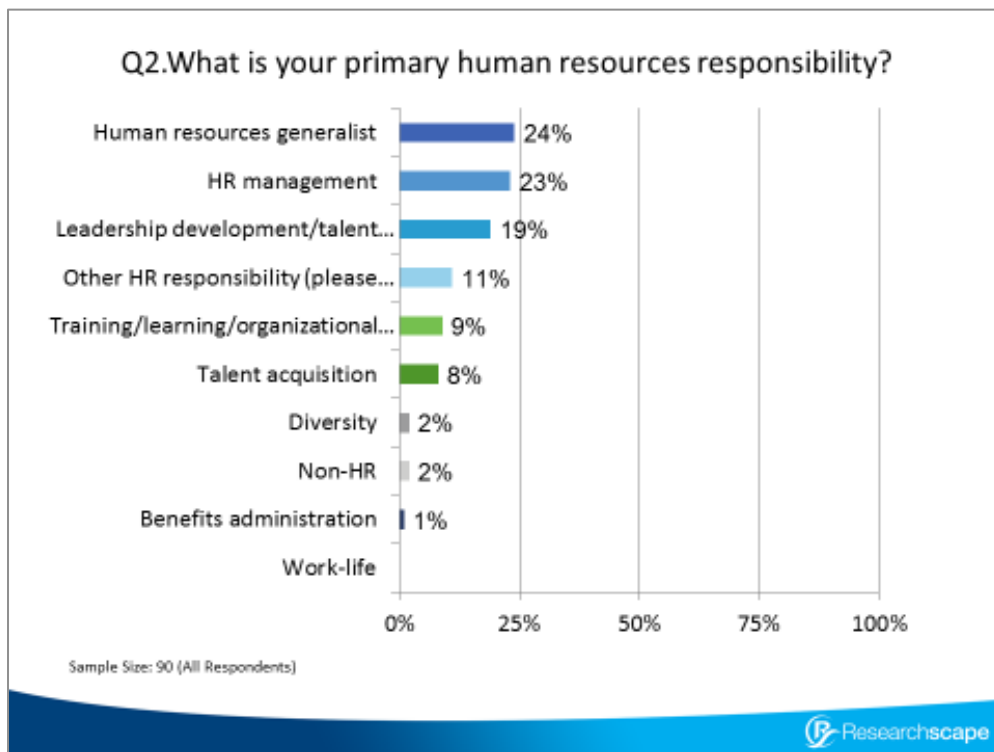
With the U.S. economy improving, close to one third of employees are seeking a new job. There's a big gap between the average organizational attrition rate (5-9%) and how many employees are actively looking for a new job in the next six months (31%).

Not only did 20% of workers report that work-life balance would be a reason to leave the current job, but 19% of people left their last job due to work-life balance. In fact, 31% of all workers had either left their last job because of issues with their work-life balance or were considering leaving their current job for that reason.

METHODOLOGY

Researchscape International surveyed 315 workers and 90 HR professionals on behalf of Julie Cohen Coaching. The online survey was fielded from February 27 to June 21, 2014; the survey took a median time of 7 minutes to complete.

HR professionals responding had a wide variety of specialties: while 24% were generalists, 23% were managers, 19% specialized in leadership development, and 9% were responsible for training.



As this was not a probability-based sample, calculating the theoretical margin of sampling error is not applicable. However, as with probability surveys, it is important to keep in mind that results are estimates and typically vary within a narrow range around the actual value that would be calculated by interviewing everyone in a population. Again, as with probability surveys, on occasion the results from a particular question will be completely outside a typical interval of error.

This survey can be assumed to be representative of the larger populations of worker and human-resources professionals for the purposes of providing qualitative insights into attitudes towards work-life balance, work satisfaction, and retention.

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