

Lifestyle costs tip balance

Ben Schneiders, Workplace Reporter, The Age, 1 March 2008

IT IS the great juggling act of modern life.

Employees would prefer greater balance between work and the rest of their lives but also face cost of living pressures that mean they have to work more than they would like.

Nearly 80% of people asked in a study by **McCrindle** Research thought that work-life balance was either very important or important to them. But nearly two-thirds of respondents said they were "driven to work more in order to earn more money for life expenses", the survey of about 800 people found.

The results are part of a paper to be presented at a work-life balance forum in Melbourne on Monday and the emphasis on balance, the paper argues, reflects profound social changes from the start of the last decade.

"Even as late as the recession of the 1990s, gen Xers (and the baby boomers before them) were grateful to have a job. Now in our economic climate, staff of all ages are more empowered to see work-life balance."

The **McCrindle** research found that if pay was within the average range, it was not the main factor in staying in that role. Job satisfaction, flexibility and security were the top three conditions respondents valued.

"Work is an important part of my life, but it is not my life, just a part of it," said one person in a focus group as part of the research. Another said: "If there's a clash in the work-life balance, life wins."

And people seem willing to move if they don't like the results. In 1960 the average job tenure was 12 years, now it is less than four years, the paper said.

Converge International's Lindsay McMillan, who commissioned the paper, said there was a challenge for business to acknowledge the shift in attitudes. "Business needs to address the fact work is not central to new generations as it was to baby boomers and their parents," he said.

But it is clear work still matters. More than 70% of respondents said that if they won the lottery and never had to work again they would still go to work.

For Mr McMillan this suggests that as fewer people join such bodies as church groups, work becomes more important in fostering a sense of community. "It is becoming the central part of relationships," he said.

The Rudd Government has addressed work-life balance in its draft workplace standards released this month. Included is the right of employees with children under school age to request flexible working arrangements.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

78.4% of people reckon work-life balance is important

65.4% have to work more to earn money for life expenses

58% say their work fits well with their idea of balance

70.4% would still work if they won the lottery

19% have frequently pretended to be busy at work

SOURCE: **McCRINDLE** RESEARCH