

70 years on and work-life balance is still eluding most Australians



It was January 1948 that the Commonwealth Arbitration Court gave official assent to the 40-hour, five day working week in Australia.

The public push for this work-life balance is synonymous with the symbol '888': 8 hours' work, 8 hours' recreation and 8 hours' sleep. However, 70 years on, it seems that this balance has eluded most Australians.

The 2016 Census results shows that we are still working long hours in paid employment, with 2 in 5 employed Australians working beyond the 8-hour day, and way beyond it when commute time is included.

Long hours

About 72% of Australians aged 15-64 are employed, 5% above the OECD average. There are more men (78%) than women (67%) in paid work. [\[OECD better life index\]](#)

Working long hours may have a negative impact on health and increase stress. The percentage of employees working 50 hours or more per week is comparable with the OECD average (13%). This means they have less time for personal care (eating and sleeping) and leisure activities such as socialising, relaxing and partaking in hobbies, which are important for overall mental and physical health. [\[OECD better life index\]](#)

Full-time workers spend on average 14.4 hours of their day (60%) on personal care and leisure activities, slightly under the OECD average of 15 hours.

Shifting priorities and needs

In our post-materialistic society, a topic that has received increasing attention is how to have a work-life balance that achieves optimal well-being.

Going by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, once our basic needs have been met, we seek to meet needs higher up the pyramid which relate to meaning and purpose. Workers today look to have multiple needs met at work. Consequentially, employers need to provide working conditions that encourage growth, learning and meaning to their work if they want to keep the best employees. Gen Y for example are willing to take a pay cut in exchange for fulfilling work.

Gen Y leads the way

Generation Y leads the revolution of job churning and career changing. Based on current trends, Generation Y will have 17 jobs across 5 careers during their lifetime.

A job for Gen Y is more than just delivering a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. They have multiple expectations of an organisation. McCrindle have conducted many studies of young job seekers, investigating the employment factors which attract and retain them, and the results of the different studies concur. It was not the size of the employer or the employer brand that attracted young workers but the;

- varied role and career pathway;
- workplace culture;

- lifestyle benefits;
- management style;
- work-life balance.

They don't seek a job as much as they seek an opportunity.

They need to feel their jobs are equipping them for the future; that they are being invested in and valued.

The increase in workplace ping pong tables, lunchrooms equipped with coffee machines and sandwich makers, and work meetings held in the local cafe highlight the recognition of staff well being, team engagement and activity-based working in achieving better retention and commitment.

Though Australia as whole is not there yet, Generation Y is leading the way in not only showing it is possible to have a work-life balance but insisting on it.

For more information

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