

Institute of Social Science, The University of Tokyo

## Research Project toward Realization of a Work-Life Balanced Society

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### Five Proposals for Realizing Work-Life Balance Drawn from "Survey on Work Styles and Work-Life Balance" Results

The University of Tokyo Institute of Social Science (Akira Suehiro, Director) in October 2008 launched, in cooperation with private companies, a Research and Workplace-based Intervention Project for the Realization of a Work-Life Balanced Society (Representative: Hiroki Sato, Professor, The University of Tokyo Institute of Social Science; Project Leader: Emiko Takeishi, Professor, Hosei University) and began investigating the promotion of work-life balance in corporations and its relation to work style. (See <http://wlb.iss.u-tokyo.ac.jp/> for details of the project activities.)

In this project, 2,800 people working in private corporations in the greater Tokyo area were surveyed. A summary of the survey results and suggestions made based on the survey are reported below.

The project members were responsible for drawing up the summary of the results and the suggestions, taking into consideration the views of the corporate participants.

#### Project introduction

#### Project members

**Hiroki Sato** (Professor, Institute of Social Science, University of Tokyo)

**Emiko Takeishi** (Professor, Faculty of Career Design, Hosei University)

**Yoshie Komuro** (President and CEO, Work Life Balance Co., Ltd.)

**Yoko Yajima** (Senior Researcher, Mitsubishi UFJ Research and Consulting Co., Ltd.)

**Shizuka Takamura** (Gender equality analyst, Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office; appointed current position as of April 2009 and participating as observer since April 2009)

**Kiyoko Yamagiwa** (Specially Appointed Professor, Rikkyo University Graduate School of Business Design)

**Mitsuyo Matsubara** (Guest researcher, Research Institute for Economics and Management, Gakushuin University)

**Yukiko Asai** (Keio University, doctoral program, Graduate School of Economics)

## **Participating corporations**

**American Home Assurance Company**

**ALICO Japan**

**ORIX Corporation (FY2008 only)**

**Shiseido Co., Ltd.**

**Toshiba Corporation**

**Hakuhodo Inc.**

**Mizuho Corporate Bank, Ltd. (from FY2009)**

## **Objectives**

1. Formation of a base for promoting and researching work-life balance (WLB) in Japan.
2. Providing industry and individual corporations with information about the need to support WLB, measures to take, benefits and effects for corporate management and human resource utilization, etc.
3. Holding of "model projects" on WLB promotion in corporations (raising awareness in management, work style innovation, making the workplace receptive to programs such as parental leave and family care leave, linking such programs to the employee benefits system).
4. Cooperating with overseas organizations researching or promoting WLB support.
5. Based on the research results, advising on policy measures for advancing and promoting WLB support and achieving broad acceptance of the concept.

## Results of "Survey on work style and work-life balance" (summary)

### 1. Survey target and methodology

#### (a) Survey target

The survey covered full-time employees and managers living in greater Tokyo, in young and low-middle age groups.

Specifically, the sample included (1) metropolitan area (persons living in Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba, and Saitama Prefectures) (2) working as full-time employees or managers in private companies of 50 persons or larger, (3) consisting of 2,800 men and women aged 25 to 44. The sample was distributed as follows to allow analysis by gender and marital status.<sup>1</sup>

#### (b) Sample distribution (persons)

	Male (1400)		Female (1400)	
	Married	Unmarried	Married	Unmarried
Age 25-34	350	350	350	350
Age 35-44	350	350	350	350

#### (c) Survey method

The survey questionnaire was made available on the survey company's Web site and filled in by persons registered with the company as survey participants, from December 12 to 22, 2008, as a self-reporting questionnaire.

### 2. Key points in survey results (mainly comparing the four categories of gender × marital status)

#### (1) Degree of work-life balance achievement

(a) Some 60 to 70 percent of both men and women have experienced work-life conflict, i.e., difficulty achieving balance between work and private life (the highest was married women at 74.6%, the lowest was unmarried men at 62.7%). Those satisfied with work-life balance (total for "very satisfied" and "somewhat satisfied" with work-life balance; hereinafter "WLB satisfaction") were 53.8%, with the rest (unsatisfied) at 46.2%. The group with the smallest percentage of "WLB satisfaction" was unmarried men, at 45.0%.

(b) Among causes of work-life conflict, the most common was "managing both work and my own interests or things I want to do" (chosen by 70.5% of unmarried women and 64.0% of

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<sup>1</sup> "Married" means currently married, while "unmarried" includes persons who have never married as well as those divorced or widowed.

unmarried men, as well as 48.8% of married women, and the top choice by all four categories). The second most common, except among married men, was "my own personal health issue." Health issues were raised especially by the unmarried, including 55.4% of unmarried men and 58.1% of unmarried women. Chosen as the number two cause by married men and number three by married women was "managing both work and child-rearing." Another factor chosen by relatively many respondents both married and unmarried was "managing both work and learning (self-improvement, etc.)." This was noted by 38.0% of married men and 32.3% of married women, and by more than 40% of unmarried respondents (men 42.8%, women 43.8%).

- (c) When asked about actions taken to resolve work-life conflicts, 42.4% overall said "None." Only 14.1% said they "asked human resources or superior for help" and a mere 1.5% said they "asked labor union for help," while "quit my job"<sup>2</sup> was chosen by 12.1%. Measures taken by those who indicated difficulty "managing both work and child-rearing" include "made work-related adjustments to solve by myself" (32.1%), "took no particular action" (29.0%), "made adjustments in the non-work aspects" (15.1%), and "gave up on the non-work aspects" (10.0%). Measures taken by those raising "my own personal health issue" include "took no particular action" (36.9%), "made work-related adjustments to solve by myself" (25.9%), "asked human resources or superior for help" (17.8%), as well as "quit my job" (15.2%), among others.
- (d) To the question, "Will you be able to continue working at your present job if you have to raise a child or care for the sick or elderly," 37.4% answered Yes, 34.7% answered No, and 27.9% said Don't know. The number answering No or Don't know was especially high among unmarried men and women.
- (e) Those with "WLB satisfaction" tended to have the greatest commitment to the organization (sharing the same objectives as the organization and willing to make efforts for the sake of the organization), to be satisfied with the workplace, to have a strong desire to work and to have a high intention to continue working in the present place.

## **(2) Working hours: gap between reality and desires**

- (a) Actual overtime<sup>3</sup> matched the desired overtime for only 31.0% of men and 44.0% of women. They matched relatively often, however, in the case of those performing "regular work with fixed starting and ending time" and those doing "office work."
- (b) Actual overtime exceeding the desired overtime ("overwork") was especially common among those eligible for a "flex-time program" and "managers." Actual overtime falling short of the

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<sup>2</sup> Here and elsewhere, since the survey covers only those working as full-time employees in private companies, those who quit their job later found new employment.

<sup>3</sup> Here and elsewhere, "overtime" is used to mean, in the case of regular workers, working hours outside the regular working hours; in the case of flex-time workers, working hours exceeding the deemed working hours; and in the case of managers, working hours exceeding the legal working hours of regular, non-management workers.

desired overtime ("underutilization") was common among "service workers," "production line workers or technicians," and "shift workers or irregular workers."

- (c) Workplaces prone to "overwork" tend to be those characterized by "high-activity operations"(\*1) or "a culture of long working hours"(\*2). On the other hand, workplaces not prone to "overwork" are characterized by "work discretion"(\*3), "efficient work management"(\*4), and "superior's consideration for private life"(\*5).

- (\*1) **High-activity operations:** A characteristic made up of the following four attributes: "heavy work responsibility or authority," "high-level quota or target to meet," "duties often popping up suddenly," and "inflexible deadlines or delivery date."
- (\*2) **Culture of long working hours:** A characteristic made up of the following three attributes: "large workload relative to number of workers," "difficult to leave when work is done because people around you remain at work," and "if you complete your work efficiently, you are likely to be given someone else's work to do."
- (\*3) **Work discretion:** A characteristic made up of the following three attributes: "ability to decide own work procedures," "ability to decide own workload," and "ability to decide when to leave the workplace."
- (\*4) **Efficient work management:** A characteristic made up of the following four attributes: "(superior) endeavors to manage tasks efficiently," "(superior) takes care not to burden certain workers with a heavier share of the work or more important work than others," "(superior) makes efforts to share necessary information with unit members," and "(superior) strives for smooth communication among members."
- (\*5) **Superior's consideration for private life:** A characteristic made up of the following three attributes: "(superior) cares about personal (non-work related) matters of workers," "superior personally adopts a vibrant work style," and "superior cares about own private life (fulfilling household role, etc.)."

### (3) Awareness regarding introduction and use of programs for balancing work and family

- (a) Regarding legally mandated programs such as parental leave and family care leave, awareness of such programs is not very high,<sup>4</sup> with a quarter of the respondents answering "no such program" (10.7%) or "don't know" (15.4%). Adding those who responded, "program exists but is hard to use" (36.5%), it is clear that access to such programs is difficult for more than 60% of full-time employees. "Program exists and is easy to use" was chosen by only 37.5% regarding parental leave and family care leave program, by 29.9% regarding a work reduction program for maternal or parental care leave and family care, and by 3.5% regarding a work-at-home program.
- (b) When those married persons whose spouse was also employed were each asked about the degree to which their own and their spouse's workplace made allowance for work-life balance,

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<sup>4</sup> Even if the company does not stipulate such a system in the employment rules, etc., maternal leave and parental leave are legally mandated and can be requested of the workplace.

in evaluating the spouse's workplace, the husband's workplace was rated relatively lower. (That is, 49.0% of men said their wife's workplace "made consideration for WLB" and 34.5% said it did not, whereas 36.2% of women said their husband's workplace "made consideration for WLB" while 56.9% said it did not.)

#### **(4) Workplace factors that determine "WLB satisfaction"**

- (a) "WLB satisfaction" is lowered greatly when either "overwork" or "underutilization" is extensive.
- (b) Another factor hindering "WLB satisfaction" is "a culture of long working hours." Factors raising "WLB satisfaction" include "work discretion," "efficient work management," and also "good communication with superior"(\*6) and "superior's consideration for private life."

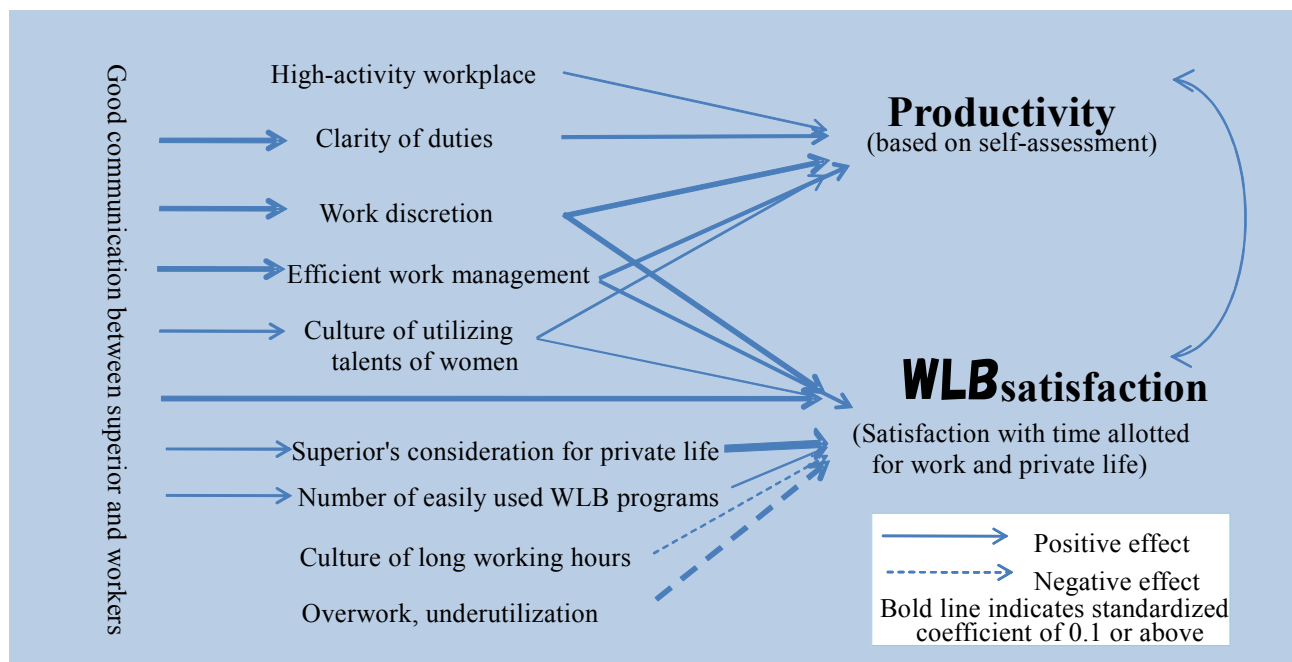
(\*6) **Good communication with superior:** A characteristic made up of the following two attributes: "superior understands my work-related problems and desires" and "communication with superior in the workplace is good."

- (c) Efforts to increase "WLB satisfaction" by improving "work discretion," "efficient work management," "culture of utilizing talents of women"(\*7) and "good communication with superior" are also highly likely to raise (self-assessed) work productivity -- a Win-Win situation for company and employees. Note that "good communication with superior" is highly likely to have an indirect positive effect on productivity, by improving such factors as "clarity of duties"(\*8), "work discretion," and "efficient work management" (see figure below).

(\*7) **Culture of utilizing talents of women:** A characteristic defined by the response, "I believe there are no barriers for women to be active" regarding the extent to which women's talents are made use of in the workplace.

(\*8) **Clarity of duties:** A characteristic made up of the following two attributes: "the work abilities (basics of knowledge and skills) required for a job are clear" and "the knowledge and skills for my own job would also be useful if I decided to work in another company."

**Figure: "Improving workplace management, besides raising WLB satisfaction, is likely to increase productivity": illustration of the direction and size of cross-variable influences based on statistical methodology**



### Explanation of relationship among variables

- "Good communication between superior and workers" besides directly raising "WLB satisfaction" is highly likely to indirectly increase both "WLB satisfaction" and "productivity."
- "Work discretion" and "efficient work management" are highly likely to have a positive effect on both "WLB satisfaction" and "productivity."
- The biggest negative effect on "WLB satisfaction" comes from "overwork" and "underutilization."
- A positive effect on "WLB satisfaction" comes not from "number of WLB programs" but from "number of easily used WLB programs." However, the effect is smaller than the impact of other management factors.
- The above "path diagram" was created by the software program Amos. (Error variables and correlation between variables are omitted.)  
 n=2,798, p value=0.00, GFI=0.96, AGFI=0.92, RMSEA=0.079.

## Five suggestions for promoting work-life balance based on the survey results

**Suggestion 1: "WLB promotion leads to improved productivity and greater commitment to the organization."** A company's efforts to promote work-life balance are seen as leading to improvements in worker productivity, making employees more committed to the organization and increasing their desire to continue working, benefiting the company's human resource utilization.

- Improving such factors as "work discretion" and "efficient work management," which are seen as workplace management characteristics deeply related to satisfaction with work-life balance ("WLB satisfaction"), along with efforts to create a "culture of utilizing talents of women," are highly likely to contribute to greater productivity. (See survey results (4) (c) and figure.)
- When employees' "WLB satisfaction" increases, this is highly likely to have beneficial effects for the company's human resource utilization, such as improving commitment to the organization (sharing the same objectives as the organization and willing to make efforts for the sake of the organization), intention to continue working in the present place, satisfaction with the workplace, and desire to work. (See survey results (1) (e).)
- Accordingly, promoting work-life balance can be expected to have benefits that go beyond employee satisfaction and raising the company's attractiveness to prospective employees, and is something a company should undertake regardless of its financial situation.

**Suggestion 2: "WLB promotion contributes to risk mitigation."** When a company makes efforts to promote work-life balance, this contributes to lowering risks in human resource utilization.

- More than 60 percent of employees, regardless of gender or marital status, have experienced "work-life conflict," difficulty harmonizing work and private life. (See survey results (1) (a).)
- Both overwork and underutilization greatly lower the "WLB satisfaction" of employees. (See survey results (4) (a).)
- Cited by both men and women as number one cause of work-life conflict was "managing both work and my own interests or things I want to do," while the difficulty of managing both work and "my own personal health issue" or "learning (self-improvement)" was also severe. (See survey results (1) (b).)
- Promoting work-life balance under these circumstances, when so many employees experience work-life conflicts, will help avoid such risks as harm to employees' health from working long hours, or the relative deterioration in the company's intellectual resources



because employees are not able to engage in self-improvement. It is therefore an important measure for risk mitigation in a company's human resource utilization.

**Suggestion 3: "Workplace management reform is necessary for WLB promotion."**

Important undertakings for realizing work-life balance are reforming "workplace management" and reforming the "workplace culture," and these must be taken up company-wide as management issues.

- Workplace management reform in areas such as "efficient work management" and "work discretion" are extremely important for improving employee "WLB satisfaction" and helping to raise productivity. Essential to these reforms is building "good communication between superior and employees." Good communication not only leads to other workplace management reforms such as "clarity of duties," "work discretion," and "efficient work management," but is also highly likely to directly raise employee "WLB satisfaction." (See survey results (4) (b) and (c) and figure.)
- Managers, being responsible for workplace management, have an important role to play in promoting work-life balance; but when managers become busy and reach an "overwork" state, they are unable to give proper attention to their management duties. In addition, when managers treat their own private life as important (fulfilling their role in their household), this is highly likely to have a positive effect on workers' "WLB satisfaction" as part of the attribute, "superior's consideration for private life." It is therefore necessary to make consideration also for manager work-life balance. (See survey results (2) (b) and (c).)
- As an essential step for creating a lasting workplace culture able to realize work-life balance through these kinds of management reform, the standards and other aspects of personnel evaluation must be revised (rating not just amount of work but also productive use of time, work quality, and efforts to improve communication, etc.). These are necessary not just for human resource utilization but need to be addressed as important management issues in a company-wide effort.

**Suggestion 4: "'Soft' measures are more important than 'hard' as a key to WLB**

**support." In applying various programs for work-life balance support, their existence needs to be made widely known and an environment must be created enabling them to be made use of readily.**

- Even in the case of legally mandated programs such as maternal and parental leave and family care leave, many respondents reported that the programs exist but are hard to use. In order to enable such programs and other work-life balance programs to be utilized effectively, employees need to be made well aware of the programs, and an environment created in which employees see these programs as "available and easy to use." Such awareness is higher when there is "good communication between superior and workers," so

improvement in this area will be effective. (See survey results (3) (a) and figure.)

**Suggestion 5: "The fastest route to WLB promotion is for society to unite in the effort."**

Promotion of work-life balance by corporations is not something that can be done fully by specific companies but must be undertaken by society as a whole.

- When married persons whose spouse was also employed were asked about the degree to which their own and their spouse's workplace made allowance for work-life balance, women tended to rate the husband's workplace relatively lower. This suggests that the cost of employee WLB support is borne disproportionately by the wife's company. In order to avoid putting an undue burden for employee WLB promotion on certain companies, society as a whole must be involved in promoting work-life balance, such as by encouraging the husband's company also to promote WLB balance for male employees. (See survey results (3) (b).)