

The State of Work-Life 2010

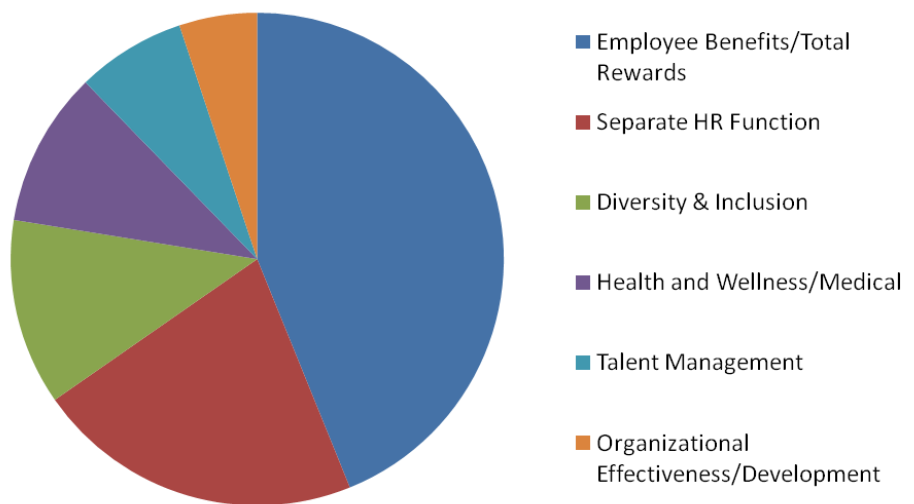
Work-Life is alive and well. Senior management commitment is robust and budgets and staffing are holding their own. Yet, there is a curious mismatch between the most serious workforce issues companies are facing and where they are investing their resources in 2010.

The Study

In February 2010, WFD Consulting and the Alliance for Work-Life Progress (AWLP) at WorldatWork launched a survey to understand the current state of work-life among U.S.-based corporations and plans and prospects for the future. Fifty-five, mostly large companies responded. Representing a wide range of industries including energy, financial services, food and agriculture, health care, hi-tech, manufacturing, professional services, and pharmaceuticals, about half are based entirely in North America. Among those with a global workforce, one-third indicate that more of their employees are outside North America, while two-thirds have more in North America.

The Findings

There is a wide mix of reporting relationships. About two-fifths (43%) of the work-life functions report to the employee benefits or total rewards organization. In one-fifth, work-life is a separate function within HR, one-tenth report to the Diversity & Inclusion organization, and another tenth to the health and wellness/medical organization.



Approach to Work-Life

When asked to describe their general approach to work-life, almost half (46%) of the responding companies indicate that they are staying focused on core or traditional work-life areas, including dependent care, flexible work arrangements, and resource and referral. A little over a third (36%) are expanding into related areas such as engagement, wellness, resilience, energy, workload, and work redesign. About one-fifth (18%) are pushing into new areas such as employee recognition, mentoring, coaching, and career management.

Programs & Services Included in Work-Life

Given the tendency toward a traditional approach to work-life, it is not surprising to find that core work-life programs and services are most likely to be included in the work-life portfolio, while programs & services more removed from the core tend to be found in smaller numbers.

Programs & Services	% Companies Including in W-L Function
Flexible Work Arrangements	80%
Employee Assistance Programs	78%
Dependent Care	67%
Health and Wellness	61%
Resource & Referral	57%
Community Outreach/Volunteering/Philanthropy	41%
Employee Engagement/Commitment	35%
Leaves/Sabbaticals	35%
Employee Recognition	33%
Mentoring/Coaching	33%
Employee Retention	33%
Culture Change Initiatives	29%
Resilience/Energy	20%
Work Innovation/Redesign	18%

Commitment to Work-Life

Senior leadership's commitment to work-life has improved or held its own. Forty percent of respondents believe that commitment from the top has been increasing and 43% believe it is holding steady. Only 17% feel that senior leadership's commitment to work-life is declining.

In terms of staffing, work-life is weathering the recession fairly well. Over the past three years, 68% of companies have maintained their staffing levels, 18% have increased staffing, and only 14% have reduced it. About half (48%) of the companies responding have less than one full time equivalent employee devoted to work-life while 42% have one to two FTEs and 10% have three or more employees committed to work-life.

Compared to 2009, work-life budgets in 2010 are steady state. About three-fifths of companies are maintaining budget with about a fifth increasing and a fifth decreasing their budgets.

Globalization of Work-Life

Among companies with a global workforce, only 19% had a quarter or more of their work-life efforts focused globally in 2009. However, respondents expect work-life to globalize rapidly with over half (56%) predicting an increase in global focus in 2010 and none anticipating a decline in global focus this year.

Most Serious Work-Life Issues and Plans to Address Them in 2010

Workload and Stress & Burnout are the most serious issues facing organizations, consistent with the slowly recovering level of employment and continuing lean workforces in the face of global competition. In third place is employee engagement/commitment, in part a serious issue because of the negative effects on engagement/commitment from overwork, stress, and burnout.

There is somewhat of a mismatch between the issues companies are planning to address and the ones they deem most important. Two out of the three top issues identified are not among the plans of most organizations. Particularly striking, given the seriousness of workload and workload-related issues, is the lack of plans to address workload and work innovation/redesign—with only about one-quarter indicating an intention to address these areas in 2010. Only 15% of organizations see career management as a serious issue, yet nearly half (48%) will be addressing career management this year. Career management can certainly contribute to improvement in engagement/commitment, morale, and other areas, but the emphasis on it seems out of proportion.

Why is there a mismatch? Perhaps it is a focus on symptoms rather than root causes or a tendency toward groupthink. Or it might simply be a continuing emphasis on what has worked well in the past. Most likely, the cause of the mismatch is that many work-life professionals have a clear conception of the serious issues, but do not fully set the agenda for what gets addressed in their organizations.

Workforce Issue	Serious Issue (Top Two)	Plans to Address in 2010
Stress and burnout	35%	38%
Workload	33%	26%
Engagement/commitment	30%	52%
Morale	15%	36%
Career management	15%	48%
Work innovation/redesign	13%	24%
Wellness/resilience/energy	13%	52%
Retention of skilled workers	11%	45%
Demographic changes	7%	24%
Diversity and inclusion	7%	36%
Productivity	7%	33%
Implementing flexible work arrangements	4%	40%
Dependent care issues	2%	19%
Managing a dispersed workforce	2%	31%
Readiness of entry-level workers	2%	12%
Retention/advancement of women	0%	33%

2010: A Busy Year for Taking Stock

Eighty-six percent of the companies responding expect to conduct some form of needs assessment in 2010. Three-fifths (61%) expect to survey their employees, and over a third plan to conduct focus groups (36%) or a benchmarking audit (34%). Fully 57% of companies will obtain feedback from managers and a third (32%) will review promotion, retention, and exit data.

The Most Valued Sources of Work-Life Information

Companies report heavy reliance on information from their colleagues through a variety of collaborations.

Top Information Sources	Percent Selecting as Two Most Valued
Membership and/or participation in roundtables, organizations, and boards	50%
Conferences	33%
Colleagues in the field	31%
Publications	23%
Webinars	21%

Conclusions

The data indicate that in this slowly recovering economy, commitment from above remains strong and the commitment of resources remains steady state. Work-life has somewhat of a “home grown” flavor as suggested by the variety of reporting relationships across companies. Does this represent our adaptability to corporate idiosyncrasies or that it isn’t clear exactly where we fit? Is this a problem for the field—an identity crisis of sorts—or does it make the field more robust? Of more concern perhaps is that companies report focusing on core areas of work-life. Does a core focus suggest a confidence and clarity about who we are or a timidity about pushing the envelope? Similarly, with most multi-national companies focusing their efforts in North America, what is standing in the way of global expansion?

As for the mismatch between the top workforce issues identified and the areas companies expect to address, does it mean that we are stuck in a conception of work-life that is less relevant to today’s issues or that we don’t have the mandate and/or the tools to address the root causes of the problems we have identified? Ultimately, these findings challenge the work-life field to solidify our identity and clarify our boundaries as we move into the future.

About WFD Consulting WFD Consulting (www.wfd.com) is a management consulting firm with over 25 years of experience formulating and implementing work-life, diversity and talent management solutions for Fortune 500 companies, government agencies, and colleges and universities. WFD's action-oriented solutions are always based on sound research and measurement, draw on its extensive global experience, and emphasize innovation.

About Alliance for Work-Life Progress[®] Alliance for Work-Life Progress (www.awlp.org) is dedicated to advancing work-life as a business strategy integrating work, family and community. An entity of WorldatWork, AWLP defines and recognizes innovation and best practices, facilitates dialogue among various sectors and promotes work-life thought leadership.

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