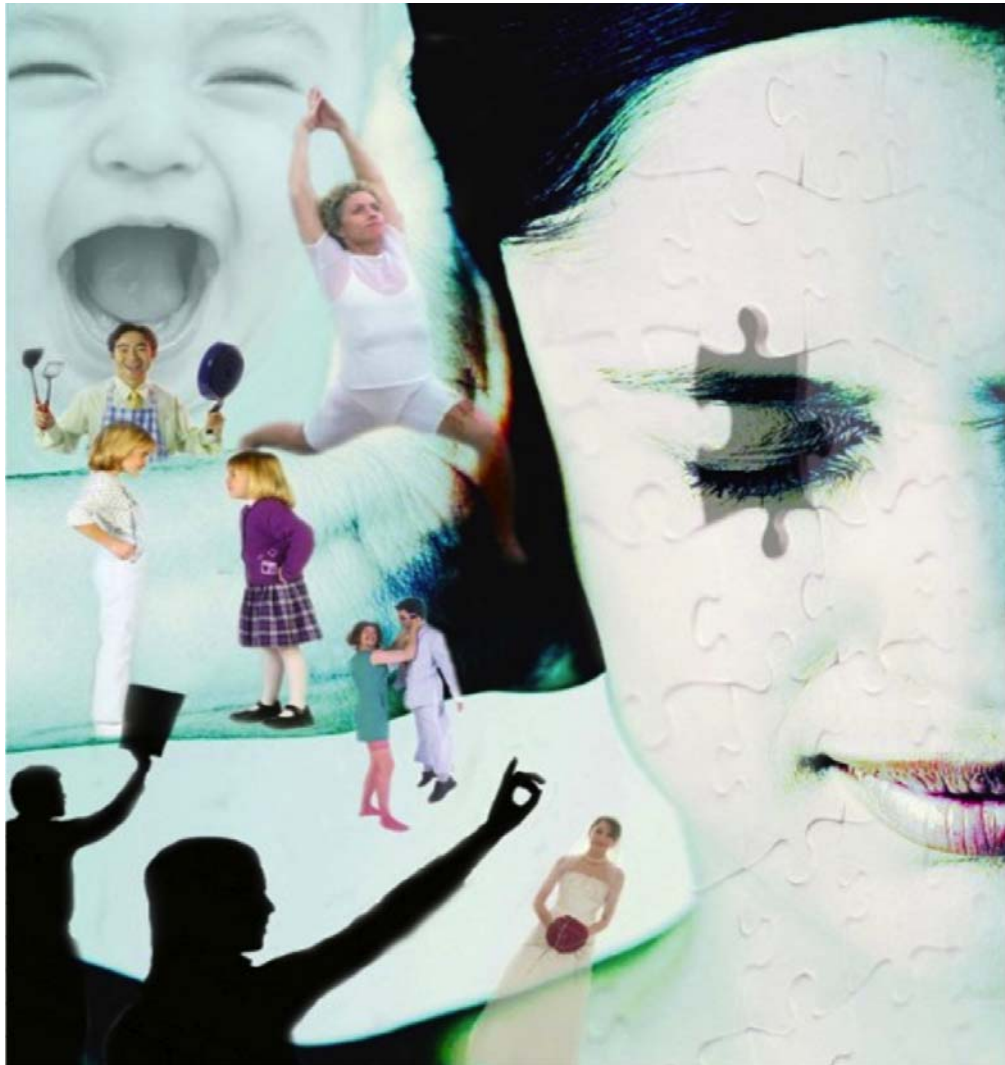




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# WORK-LIFE MANAGEMENT

A VIEW ON HOW EUROPEANS MANAGE TO COPE WITH WORK  
AND PRIVATE LIFE  
REPORT TO UNI 2010







# CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>HAPPINESS IS THE BASIS</b> .....	<b>4</b>
THE THREE ROOMS OF HAPPINESS .....	5
WORK-LIFE MANAGEMENT IMPORTANT FOR HAPPINESS .....	6
AMBITIONS AND THEIR FULFILMENT .....	7
<b>WORK-LIFE BALANCE</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>WORK-LIFE BALANCE: A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE</b> .....	<b>13</b>
HONEY, ARE YOU HOME? .....	14
<b>STRATEGIES FOR WORK-LIFE MANAGEMENT</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>THE RECIPE FOR SUCCESS</b> .....	<b>21</b>
HOW SHOULD EMPLOYERS ACT? .....	22
<b>ABOUT KAIROS FUTURE</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>END NOTES</b> .....	<b>25</b>



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Europe is facing both an increasing global competition and a huge demographic shift. The European work force needs to improve its efficiency and skills in order to face up to the competition, whilst its population is aging and there are fewer and fewer people having to support the growing numbers of pensioners. Also people enter into the labour market later and later, families are formed at a higher age and there are fewer children per family.

All this puts extra pressure on people in the workplace. We want to do a good job, but at the same time be able to lead a good life. But how can we cope with this duality? How can we achieve work-life management?

People who are happy with their lives and manage to strike a good work-life balance, seem to be happy in three areas, which we will classify into 'rooms': the 'Inner Room' – the personal sphere, 'the Living Room' – the private sphere, and 'the Work Room' – the professional sphere. The 'Inner Room' is about being happy about oneself, feeling confident about the future and having the ability to cope with life. The 'Living Room' is about having a trustful and intimate relationship with somebody on whom one can lean and get support from. Finally, the 'Work Room', is about having influence, receiving affirmation and feeling commitment at work, as well as having trust in one's superior.

Employers could facilitate favourable conditions in at least two of these three rooms by creating an open and trusting culture, by giving managers the time to relate to and give feedback to employees and by allowing time for reflection and thought, both at work and off work. Employers could also promote exercise and health among their employees, which would help people both feel and perform better.

Having ambition in life is a good thing, especially if one manages to fulfil them. We have found four types of ambitious people: the high achievers, who are able to achieve their high ambitions in all aspects of life; the overstretched, who have high ambitions but fail to realize them; the resigned, who do not even fulfil low ambitions; and finally the 'campers', who are happy just to fulfil their low ambitions. The overstretched and the resigned have great difficulties managing their work-life balance. They feel inadequate in their work as well as in their private lives. These are people who need support in order to cope with their situations.

The high achievers and the campers seem to manage their work-life balance well.

There are of course measures and strategies that can be employed at policy level all over Europe to improve work-life management. These include making working hours more flexible and introducing new ways of working. This means that people should have the possibility to decide where and when they wish to work and that there will be technical systems (IT, telephone, etc.) in place to support them. These policies need to be introduced at EU, as well as national and organizational levels.

Other strategies include more care facilities for young children and dependent persons, longer parental leave with higher pay, etc., and making it compulsory for companies to deploy measures aimed at helping their employees to achieve a better work-life balance. The importance of these measures differs from one country to the next throughout Europe.

Gender equality is of great importance. Men and women need to share burdens of work and home life. They need to support each other to cope with the pressures of modern life.



# INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years there has been an increasingly intense debate regarding *work-life balance*: the way in which we manage our everyday lives when we reach middle age and we have greater responsibilities and more worries.

As we shall see, the generation of people who are in this phase of their lives today want to *make the most of all aspects* of their lives. It is no longer sufficient to be successful at work – we also have to be good parents, stay fit and have interesting hobbies. People between 30 and 50 years of age have high ambitions regarding all aspects of their lives and aim for a 'perfect life' and the ideal image of 'happiness'. We call these individuals the Generation Ambition.

Many of today's 30-40 year-olds 'extend' their adolescence and lead lives that used to be associated with the late teenage years. This group waits longer to settle down and have a family and children. They try to squeeze in both career and family during the short period of time between 30 and 50 years old. This is a time when a balance needs to be struck between one's professional and private lives. It calls for work-life management.

Many people attain this balance and cope with stress, while others tend to be overstretched – they become burned out or overstressed. The increased numbers of sick days off, frequently due to psychosomatic factors, clearly spell out that we are becoming unhappier despite enjoying a higher degree of welfare.

People who are between 30 and 50 years of age bear the overall responsibility of the modern welfare society. They constitute the majority of the work force in businesses, governing bodies and organizations and are also the main consumers. Their potential failure to manage their lives might have a serious impact on society. We would like to increase our understanding about what individuals and employers could do to help this generation – and others – to manage their lives better.

The current debate is largely about 'work-life balance'. Here we aim to take an in-depth look at work-life management, that is, how people could cope with today's requirements.

In this report we make an effort to understand and explain what makes people feel happy about their existence despite stress and high ambitions, despite elevated demands prevailing in their work and private lives at the same time. This study will therefore attempt to pinpoint people who are 'healthy' and 'happy' with their lives and their work.

The core of this report is a survey carried out by Kairos Future in six European countries regarding work-life balance – the Generation Ambition Survey<sup>i</sup>. That means we focus on the generation of people who are between 30 and 50 years old. In order to give a broader view, we have included other generations, other countries and data from a number of open sources within the EU and research communities.

## HAPPINESS IS THE BASIS

What is work-life balance or work-life management? And is there a relation between work-life balance and happiness?

Wikipedia gives the following definition: "*Work-life balance is the proper prioritizing between "work" (career and ambition) on one hand and "life" (pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development) on the other. Related, though broader, terms include "lifestyle balance" and "life balance". [...] there is a large individual component in that. Meaning, each individual's needs, experiences, and goals, define the balance and there is not a one size fits all solution. Also, what work-life balance does not mean is an equal balance in units of time between work and life.*"<sup>ii</sup>

It is thus about the possibilities that exist for people to manage their lives with regard to their personal desires, family needs and demands and their professional obligations. People who are happy in all three these fields are – not surprising – happy with their lives.



## THE THREE ROOMS OF HAPPINESS

Happiness is here regarded as the subjective perception of being happy with life in general. There are three factors that are connected to three different parts of a person's environment: a personal sphere – the 'Inner Room'; a private sphere – the 'Living Room' and a professional sphere – the 'Work Room'.

For people to be happy and able to manage their lives they need to have a positive mindset, a partner whom they love and on whom they can rely for support, and a stimulating job that is characterized by influence, affirmation and commitment. In addition they should have trust in their superiors. The following image illustrates the most important conclusions.

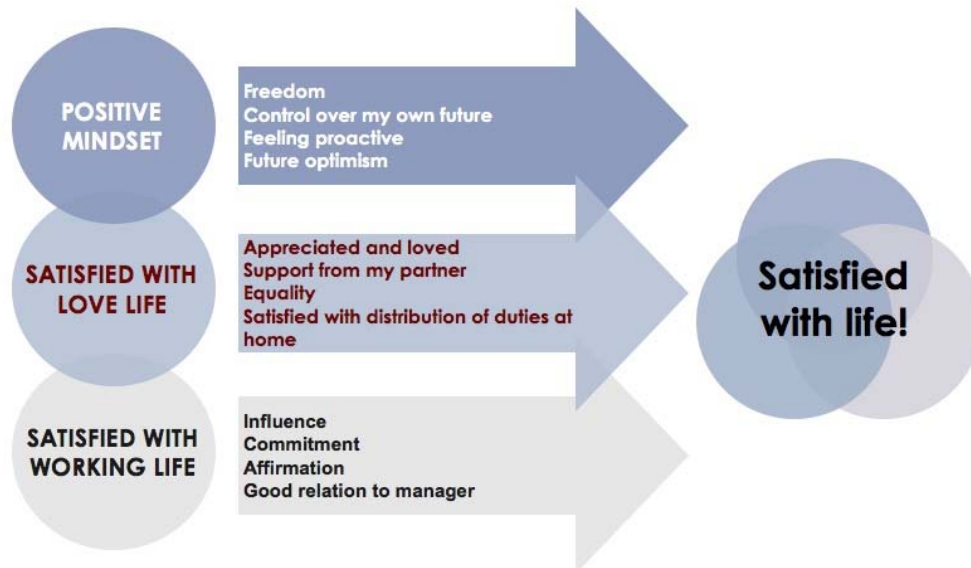


Figure 1. The Inner Room, the Living Room and the Work Room facilitate the conditions for a good life.

### *The Inner Room: it's in your mind and attitude*

The most important thing is to have a positive mindset. While it might appear self-evident, we must not overlook the fact that being predisposed to positive thinking is an essential part of a person's happiness. Examples of characteristics of individuals who have a positive outlook on life include feeling content and happy in general, being strong and full of energy.

But there are two main features that distinguish people who have a positive outlook from others. Firstly they are more proactive and secondly they feel optimistic about the future. These two factors are gelled in the notion that 'I am completely free and in control of my own future'.

### *The Living Room: Does love make a difference?*

The second most crucial factor is feeling happy with relationships in general and romantic relationships in particular. Here we focus on personal relationships in general and more specifically, a person's relationship with his or her partner.

All relationships are obviously not the same. Merely having a partner does not make individuals happier and more content. The relationship has to be healthy and loving in order to have a positive impact. Crucial factors in the way a relationship works in a couple are feeling appreciated and loved, being able to rely on a partner for support during life's problems and difficulties and finally perceiving the relationship as an equal partnership in which domestic duties are shared satisfactorily.





## *The Work Room: Stimulation rather than structure*

The final critical factor involves relationships in the workplace, affecting one's job satisfaction. Even if personal relationships are completely satisfying, being unhappy at work has negative consequences on a person's overall happiness in life.

The factors most strongly associated with job satisfaction might be summarized in three broad concepts: influence, affirmation and commitment. It is also of very important for employees to have trust in their managers or superiors.

## WORK-LIFE MANAGEMENT IMPORTANT FOR HAPPINESS

Happiness is to some degree dependent on work-life balance, but of course other issues within the three rooms mentioned above also bring about happiness.

In the Generation Ambition survey, work-life balance accounts for about 10 % of happiness. That means it is very significant, but should not be regarded as *the solution*.

### *Love and work interact*

We can conclude that a positive mindset and a good relationship with a supportive partner are the main factors affecting an individual's happiness and wellbeing. In addition, it is important to bear in mind that work also has a significant impact on happiness in life. Employers may have a big impact on the two personal rooms. For example, they can provide their employees with job security by means of salaried positions and good feedback. Employees will therefore have a sense of control over their lives and their future, which constitutes a vital element of a positive outlook. This in turn will have a positive impact on the employees' relationships. Individuals who do not have to worry about the future are able to focus more on the present and their loved ones. A stimulating workplace is also an essential part of job satisfaction. While this is an apparently obvious conclusion, it is crucial to emphasize the critical importance of work and its huge impact on employees' personal lives.

### *Employee's relationship with his or her superior is crucial*

It is very interesting – and somewhat surprising – to note that trust in one's superior appears to be a vital aspect of job satisfaction and the chances that individual will change jobs (see Figure 2) or to call in sick.

This means that the way in which a manager is perceived by the rest of the workers is much more important than the manager's performance. If there is no trust, the work won't be done.

Maybe incentive schemes should take this into account.

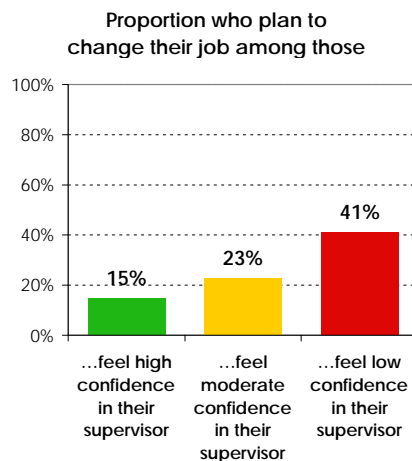


Figure 2. *With low confidence in their superior, the tendency to change job almost triples!*



## *Actual and perceived satisfaction: two different things*

While the gender differences were not as significant as we had expected, they did exist. Examples include factors such as anxiety, stress, finances and sharing of domestic duties. The question of sharing tasks at home is particularly interesting. It is very unequal – women carry out most of the chores. Both women and men are nevertheless happy with their sharing of duties and believe that their relationship is equal. Results also revealed that women and men perceive reality differently. It seems that men do not notice all the chores their partners carry out at home. See page 14 and onwards.

## *Happy despite not having enough time*

Time is a crucial issue for work-life balance and management. The balance is upset when one feels a (great) lack of time. A nickname for the Generation Ambition is YUPPLOTS – Young Urban Professional Parents with Lack Of Time.

A number of work-life factors are essential for individuals to be happy despite not having enough time:

- Support (from partner at home and colleagues at work).
- Time off (time that is not spent on either work or family responsibilities: 'time for oneself').
- Flexible hours (being able to set one's own working hours).

The above strategies are vital for work-life management and are considered to be among the most important ones according to a survey done by the EU (see page 18), especially the third one, flexible working hours and working conditions, on which the individual is able to exert an influence.

# AMBITIONS AND THEIR FULFILMENT

## LIVING UP TO HIGH AMBITIONS

The 30-50 generation has high ambitions. For example, 4 out of 5 white-collar workers say that they have high ambitions when it comes to their work performance and 82% have high ambitions when it comes to making time for their families (see Figure 3). More importantly, 2 out of 3 have high ambitions in *both* these areas. For white-collar managers, the number is even higher: 73% report having high ambitions both when it comes to performing at work *and* spending lots of time with their families. Furthermore, the typical member of Generation Ambition also has high ambitions when it comes to developing as a person and disposing of leisure time.

There are slight differences between managers and non-managers. Managers have higher ambitions regarding work while non-managers seem to have higher ambitions regarding family. Not surprisingly, managers have significantly higher ambitions regarding building a career.



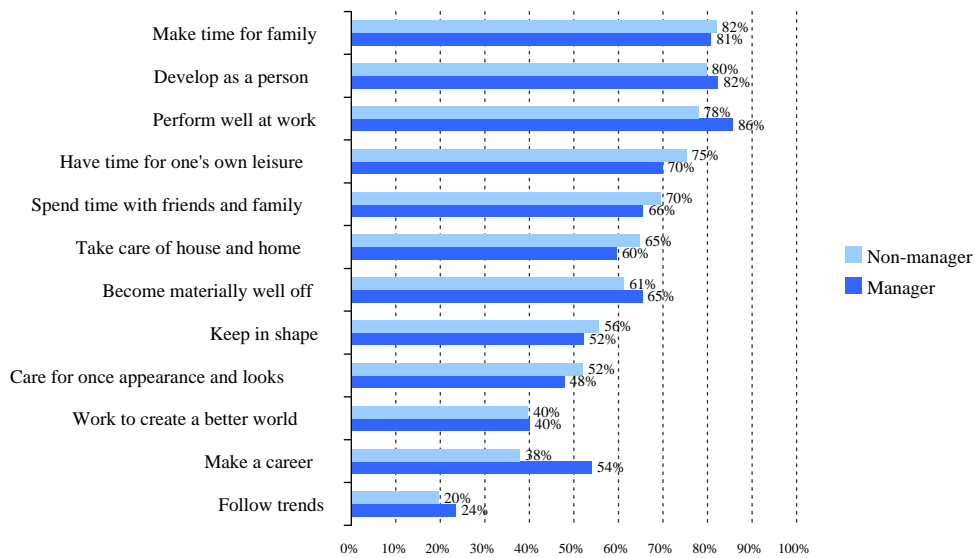


Figure 3. Share of white-collar workers who say that they have high ambitions in different areas of life. Managers and non-managers. (Source: Kairos Future)

Luckily, quite a few also report that they manage to live up to their ambitions: 3 out of 4 manage to fulfil their ambitions at work, while 2 out of 3 do so when it comes to spending time with their families (see Figure 4). Around half of the white-collar workers (54%) manage to live up to their ambitions in *both* these aspects of life. However, the other half does not. Even fewer manage to fulfil *all* their ambitions in life.

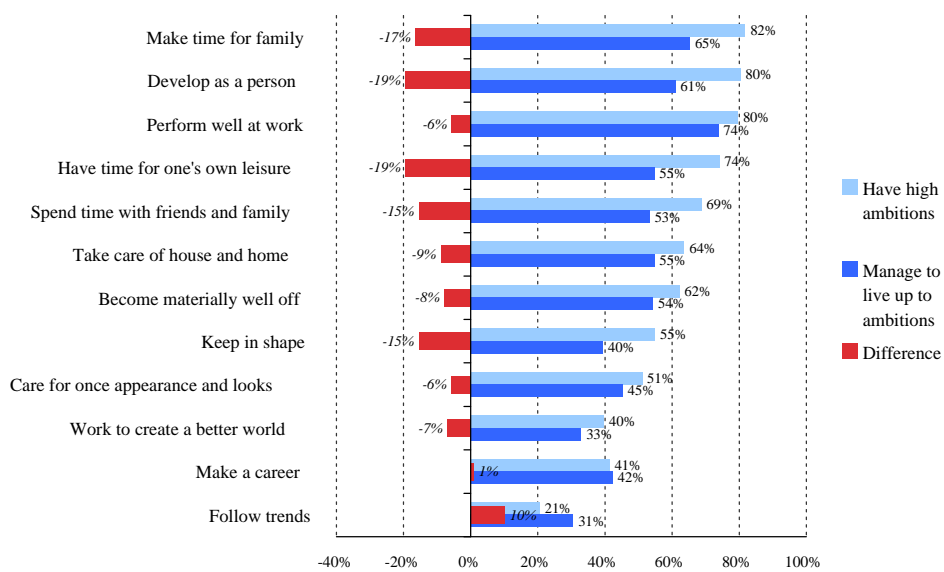


Figure 4. Share of white-collar workers (managers and non-managers) who say they have high ambitions in different areas of life, compared to the share who say they live up to their ambitions in the same areas (source: Kairos Future)

Failing to live up to one's ambitions has severe negative consequences for overall life satisfaction: only 44% of highly ambitious people that do not achieve their own ambitions report feeling satisfied with life as a whole. Among highly ambitious people who do manage to fulfil their ambitions, the figure is 74%. Thus a crucial question is: what helps people in 'Generation Ambition' live up to the high standards they set for themselves?



## The ambition matrix

We believe that both happiness and work-life management are correlated to ambitions<sup>1</sup>. We thus looked into the ambitions of those polled regarding various areas in life. We also enquired to what extent they thought that they fulfilled their expectations. Based on these two sets of questions we were able to identify four distinct groups. These four groups are summarized graphically in an ambition matrix set out in Figure 5: Level of Ambition and Fulfillment: Can everybody manage?

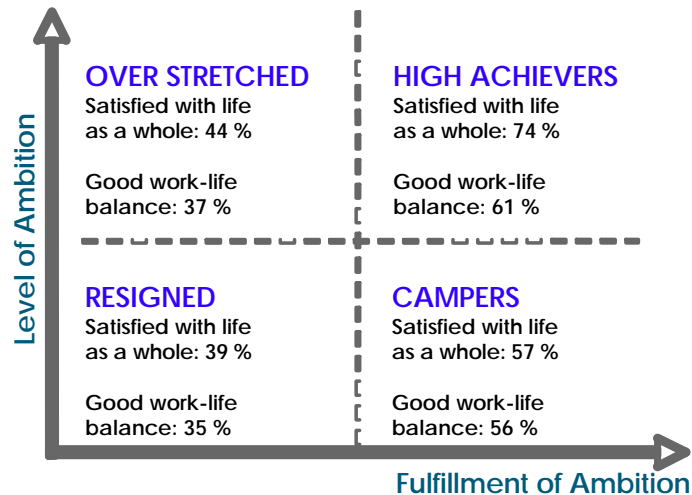


Figure 5. Level of Ambition and Fulfillment: Can everybody manage?

**THE HIGH ACHIEVERS:** They manage to fulfil their high ambitions. They make time for themselves, they exercise regularly, are healthy, have a good financial position and they rely on people around them for support. They manage to achieve a good work-life balance.

**THE OVERSTRETCHED:** They fail to fulfil their high ambitions. People born in the 1970's are slightly over-represented in this category: they often hold salaried positions, are stressed out and feel ill. In addition, they do exercises less often.

**THE RESIGNED:** People in this category do not succeed in realizing their low ambitions. They are often men who work in small businesses, live in small towns and have a vocational education. These individuals rarely volunteer for work in non-profit organizations and have trouble sleeping.

**THE CAMPERS:** While campers have few ambitions, they manage to fulfil them. They are often men who live in the city. They have jobs in businesses with 51-200 employees, often hold executive positions and rarely experience periods of extreme workload. They manage a good work-life balance.

<sup>1</sup> One might ask whether it is relevant to discuss 'high ambitions' in general. One person might be ambitious about spending time with his or her family, while having lower ambitions regarding job performance or vice versa. The results, however, showed a remarkably high correlation between all the variables concerning ambition. This means that a person who is ambitious regarding a certain aspect of his or her life is probably ambitious in other areas as well. This empiric conclusion concurs with the theoretical debate about this generation and its views. In addition, it provides statistical support for constructing a compound index that measures the overall level of ambition. (Cronbach's alpha = 0,82). This is also true regarding the degree of fulfillment.



## ***Life satisfaction, work-life balance and high achievement are all interlinked***

Although being a 'high achiever' is certainly a desirable state, there is a risk that keeping up with one's own high ambitions comes at a price. For instance, only half of the people polled in this survey (52%) reported that they generally manage to maintain a good work-life balance. 45% suffer from lack of time – among which 55% are white-collar managers. Luckily a slightly higher proportion (63%) generally feels satisfied with their lives.

However, the three parameters of ambition fulfilment, general life satisfaction and perceived work-life balance, turn out to be closely interlinked. For instance, among people who maintain a good work-life balance, 75% reported being happy with their lives as a whole. Among people who fail to achieve work-life balance, only half (51%) reported feeling happy with their lives in general. And the high achievers (highly ambitious people who live up to their high ambitions) are not more stressed than people with lower ambitions in life.

So it is entirely possible to be a high achiever without having a good work-life balance and vice-versa – *it is in fact possible to 'have everything' – just as generation ambition desires!* However, for this to happen, the right conditions have to be in place.

## ***High achievers differ from the average respondent***

Both high achievers and campers say they are able to fulfil their ambitions. The common traits of these two groups are the ability to get support from their family and friends, good and clear sharing of domestic chores, a sound financial position with savings and last but not least, a good work-life balance.

What makes the high achievers so special? Why are they satisfied with life? A good relationship and support from a partner are the main factors for encouraging ambitious individuals to perform well and fulfil their ambitions. People in this group are distinguished from the rest because they are more likely to prioritize their activities by doing exercises regularly, making time for themselves, placing a high value on their looks and keeping fit.

It seems as if they are able to manage their lives in many respects. They find it possible to manage their own work with good support systems, combined with clear responsibilities and authority at work.

They are also good at asking for help. Instead of knowing or doing or everything by themselves, they ask for support and help when needed, both in their private lives and at work.



# WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Is there a balance between work and life? And how can we describe it?

Michael Kastner<sup>iii</sup> has illustrated this as a seesaw (see Figure 6). There are pressures and requirements imposed on the individual, both from an inner perspective and from outer forces. On the other side of the seesaw there are a number of resources aimed at balancing this pressure. Finally, there are some buffers that will moderate the swing. These too have personal, situational and organizational perspectives.

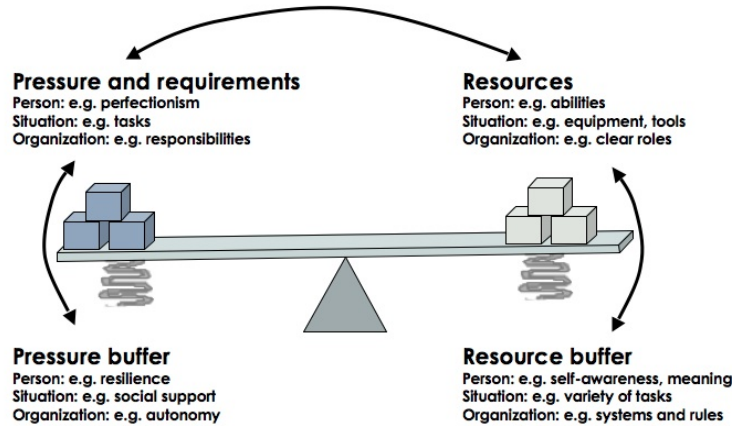


Figure 6. The dynamics between personal, situational and organizational factors for balancing pressure and resources (adopted from Michael Kastner)

The resources and buffers are also identified in the work-life management map.

## The work-life management map

Figure 7 shows the work-life balance map of white-collar workers. The vertical axis shows the share of respondents who agree on the different statements about their workplace and work situation. The horizontal axis shows the correlation of each statement to perceived work-life balance among respondents.

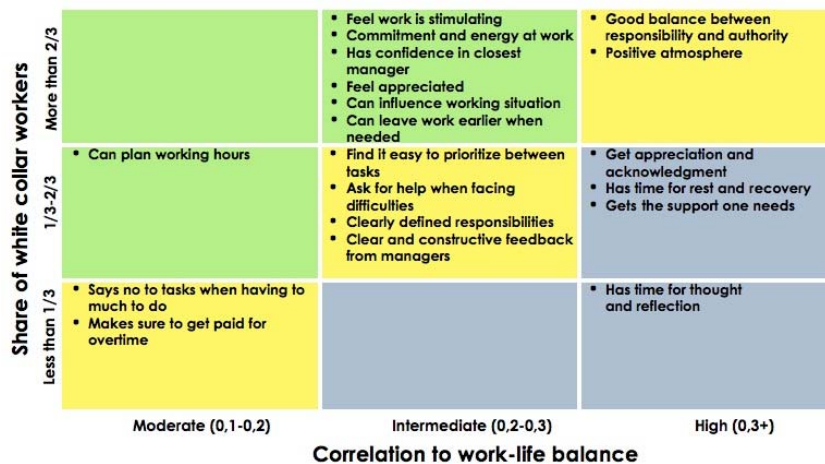


Figure 7. Important measures for achieving work-life balance (source: Kairos Future)



Having time for thought and reflection has strong positive consequences for work-life balance. In today's high-paced workplace, less than a third of white-collar workers feel they have that time. Other important prerequisites for work-life balance are sufficient support, appreciation and acknowledgement. Between 1/3 and 2/3 of the white-collar workers feel they get this acknowledgement and feedback from managers. And more than 2/3 of them feel they have a good balance between responsibilities and authority, as well as a good atmosphere at the workplace. This gives hope for achieving happiness with the work life, and thus with life in general.

Also, a majority of the white-collar workers feel they can influence the working situation and working hours. This means they have some measures for managing the work-life balance. Thus, to some degree they do have the means for dealing with their professional and private lives.

Significantly, a 2008 study<sup>iv</sup> of 8000 Swedish job advertisements showed that the most sought-after qualities in applicants were 'structured', 'able to work well under pressure' and 'self-directed'. In other words: since the workplace will not provide sufficient structure or support and coaching, the individual employee needs to take care of this him/herself, as well as deal with the stress that often results from this.

However, as we have seen, it is not a good idea to try to be superman or superwoman. Asking for support makes life easier, even – or even especially – for high performing people. But if a support culture is not built into the organization, many are at risk of not seeking and receiving help when needed, resulting in lower quality work, higher levels of stress and lower levels of work-life balance.



# WORK-LIFE BALANCE: A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

*"Demographic change and labour market developments are shaping the work and family life of Europeans, with far-reaching consequences for the future." – Second European Quality of Life Survey, 2007.*

The European Union is currently faced with some major challenges. The demographic shift has resulted in a growing share of the population being supported by a steadily decreasing working population. Another challenge is how to make sure that the European Union remains a competitive actor in a 'flat' world<sup>v</sup>.

No matter how we ultimately choose to respond, it is clear that these challenges will turn out to have far-reaching implications for the work-life balance of European citizens. With an increasingly fierce global competition, financial uncertainty is escalating. Less job security means more pressure to perform. More pressure to perform results in higher levels of work-related stress, which in turn spills over into other areas of life. An ageing population means that we will be forced to work more and longer in order to maintain the standard of living that we have gotten used to.

These challenges will have an enormous effect on the work-life balance of European households.

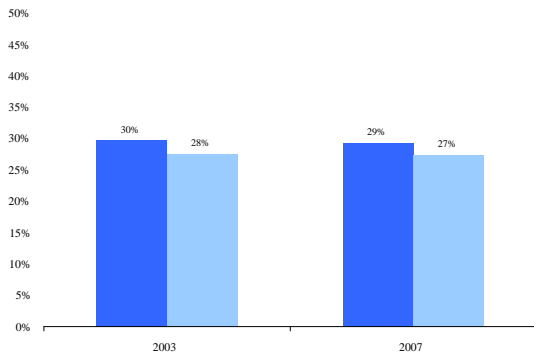


Figure 8. Share of people for whom it has been difficult to meet their family responsibilities because of the amount of time spent on the job. (EU25) (Source: EurLife)

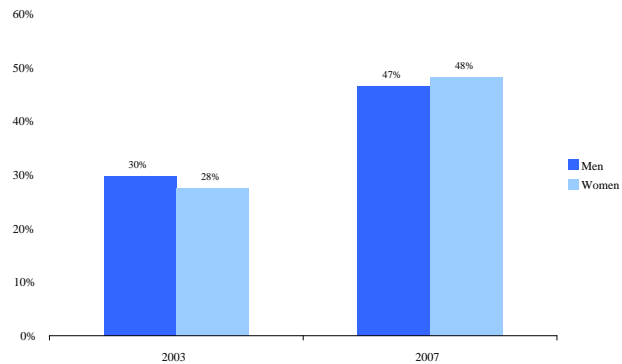


Figure 9. Share of people who 'several times a week' or 'several times a month' get home from work too tired to carry out some of the household chores (EU25) (Source: EurLife)

Already today, almost one third of the European working populations find it difficult to fulfil their family duties on account of their workload<sup>vi</sup> (see Figure 8). This seems to have stabilized over the years 2003-2007, but other indicators call for reflection. For instance, the number of people who reported getting home from work too tired to carry out some of the household chores skyrocketed from 30 to 48% between 2003 and 2007 (see Figure 9). Against such a background, it is clear that balancing the seesaw of work-life management is an issue that European citizens need to address.





## HONEY, ARE YOU HOME?

There is currently a quiet revolution taking place in the affluent society as more and more women are joining the workforce. According to Eurostat, between 1997 and 2007 the employment ratio for European women rose by almost 10%, while the corresponding number for European men barely rose at all (see Figure 10).

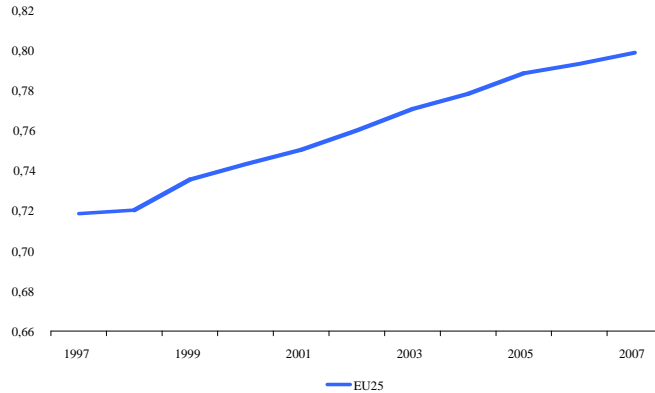


Figure 10. Ratio of employed women compared to men. (Source: Eurostat)  
1 = one employed woman for each employed man.

For the European Union this trend is a mixed blessing. On the one hand, an increasing share of women joining the labour force at least partially solves the issue of where the extra hours of work needed to support the growing share of the non-working population, is going to come from. On the other hand, an increasing share of women joining the labour force means an increased downward pressure on a fertility rate that is already worryingly low.

At the household level, the influx of traditionally non-working groups into the labour force means fewer people left to take care of the home. Traditionally women have borne a much larger part of the household chores than men and to a large extent this is still the case in many European countries<sup>vii</sup> (see Figure 11 and Figure 12). Nevertheless, it is difficult to see how this state of affairs could persist in the long run if the trend towards an increasing share of women joining the workforce continues.

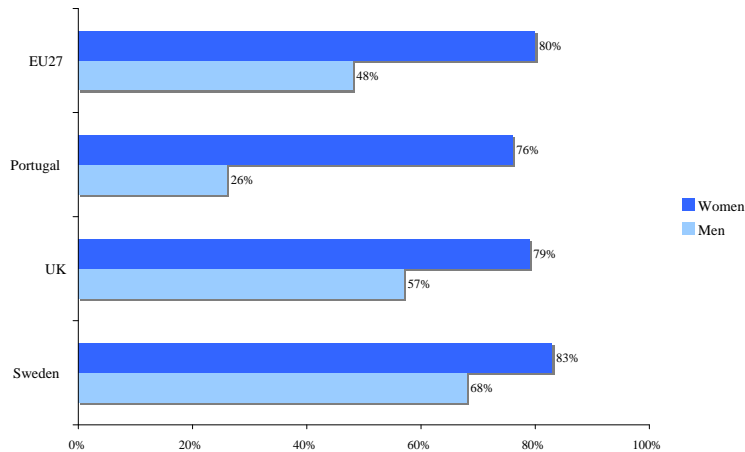


Figure 11. % of respondents who reported being involved in typical household chores (caring for children, cooking, etc.) on a daily basis. (Source: EQLS 2007)

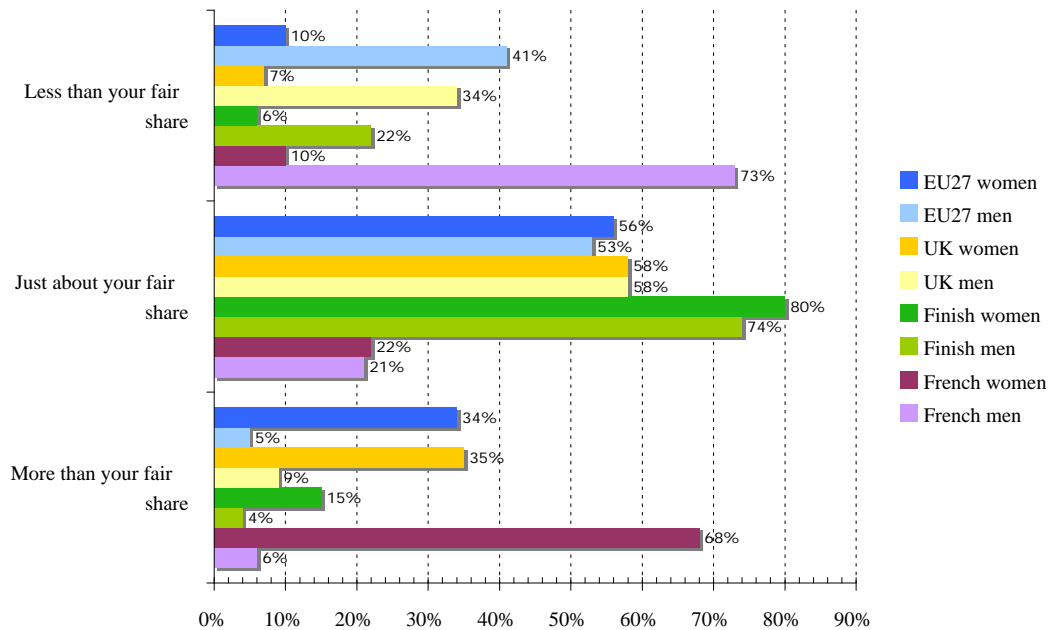


Figure 12. How would you describe your share of the household chores?  
(Source: EQLS 2007)

The sharing of household chores is still very unequal in Europe. Men and women agree that women perform almost all domestic duties on a typical weekday, see Figure 13. That would also imply that it is more difficult for women to manage their work-life situation. If they first need to put in a full day's work at their workplace and then take full responsibility for their family and home, the pressure may be too high.

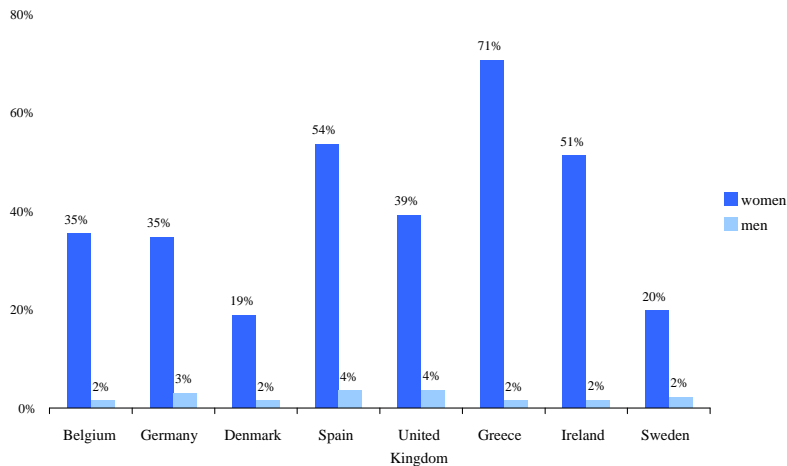


Figure 13. Of the total amount of hours spent on household chores (cooking, cleaning but not including childcare and leisure activities) on a typical weekday, how much of this time do you put in yourself? Share of respondents that responded 'all or nearly all'. (Source: ESS4-2008<sup>viii</sup>)

Interesting enough, there seems to be a difference between actually being responsible for and spending time on household duties on the one side and the perception of equality on the other. Although men and women agree on the actual differences, almost 60 % of women working full time are pleased with the sharing of household chores (see Figure 14), and 71 % consider their relationship as being equal<sup>ix</sup>.

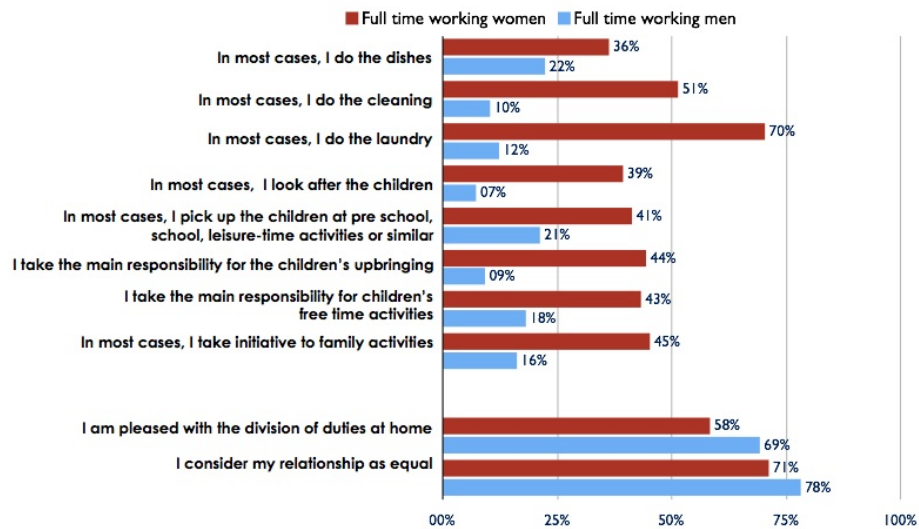


Figure 14. Division of household chores and perception of equality (source: Kairos Future)

### Similar challenges, different prerequisites

Although the key challenges are the same throughout Europe, their specific implications on questions related to work-life management are likely to differ greatly from one member country to another. Not only do we encounter different cultural norms and attitudes towards work-life management and gender roles as we move across Europe, but also do we find different household structures, different numbers of average hours worked per week (see map below) as well as different institutional settings.

→ **q8a. How many hours do you usually work per week in your main paid job?**

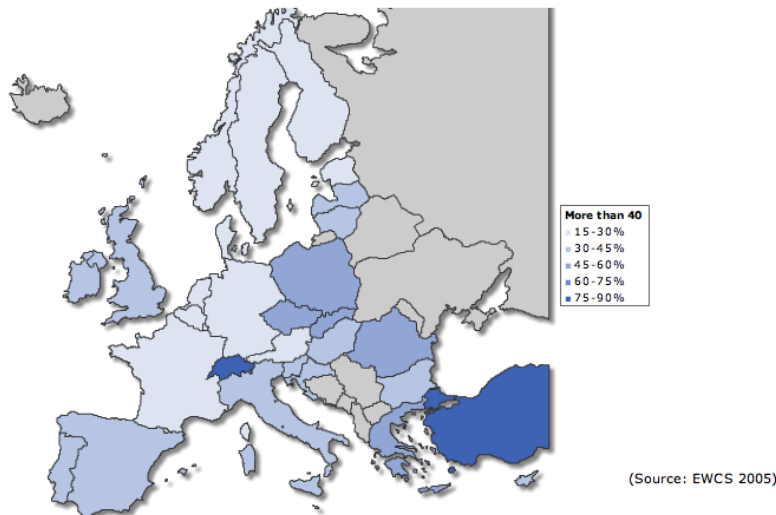


Figure 15. Working hours per week throughout EU – segment working more than 40 h/week

The structure and provision of eldercare and childcare services are examples of institutional settings that vary a lot from country to country, while simultaneously having a direct bearing on the work-life balance of individuals (see also page 18). Another example is the extent to which individuals feel that they have the possibility to control or decide on how their daily work should be organized – an area that is of key importance to the ability to successfully balance work and family demands and which also varies a lot across the continent (Figure 16).

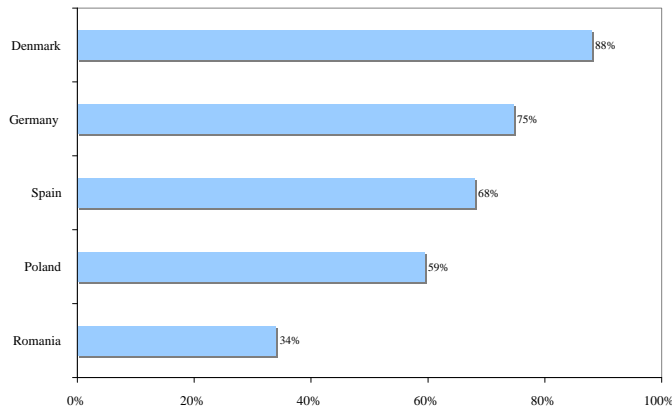


Figure 16. Share of respondents who feel they have sufficient or good control over how to organize their daily work. (Source: ESS4-2008)

## Work-life balance and its relation to overall feelings of well-being

It is hardly surprising that how to best balance the dual demands of work and family is a major question facing most Europeans. What might be surprising however is the fact that one's success in this area appears to be directly related to one's overall feeling of well-being and satisfaction in life. As Figure 17 indicates, people who do not find it difficult to handle the work-life balance are more likely to feel satisfied with their lives than those who feel pressure both at home and at work. Similarly, people who only experience slight pressure from family and work are more likely to feel satisfied with their lives than those who are under great pressure.

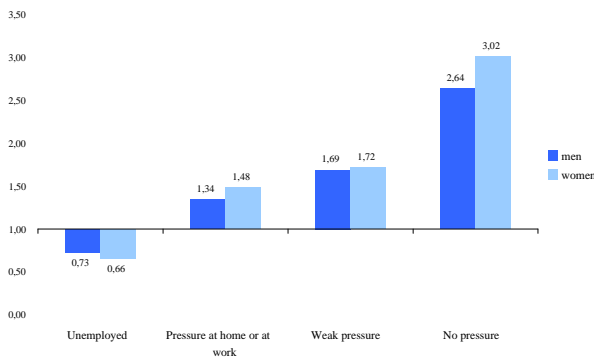


Figure 17. Life satisfaction by strain-based work-family conflict, EU25. (Reference category: pressure at home and at work) (Source: EQLS 2007)

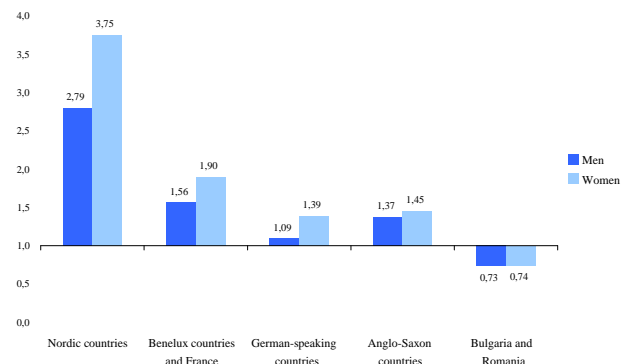


Figure 18. Life satisfaction by gender and country groups (reference group: southern European countries) (Source: EQLS 2007)

Considering that feelings of well-being is such a significant gauge of feelings in other areas as well, finding ways to help individuals achieve a better work-life balance might be one of the most effective means of raising the overall feeling of life satisfaction on a national scale. Data from the 2007 European Quality of Life survey suggests that there are currently large differences with respect to the level of overall happiness across Europe (see Figure 18), which the authors feel can largely be attributed to the fact that the type of institutional mechanisms in place for helping people to manage their work-life balance varies significantly from one country to the next.



# STRATEGIES FOR WORK-LIFE MANAGEMENT

There are various strategies and measures aimed at making it easier for people to manage their professional and private lives to be found. As indicated in the previous section, both satisfaction with life and strategies to cope with work-life management differ across EU.

## *Can we enhance work-life balance at all?*

There are a number of proposed strategies to make life easier. Many of these have to do with gender equality and gender issues. Others have to do with institutional or organizational measures. A number of measures are already in place, but to different degrees within the EU.

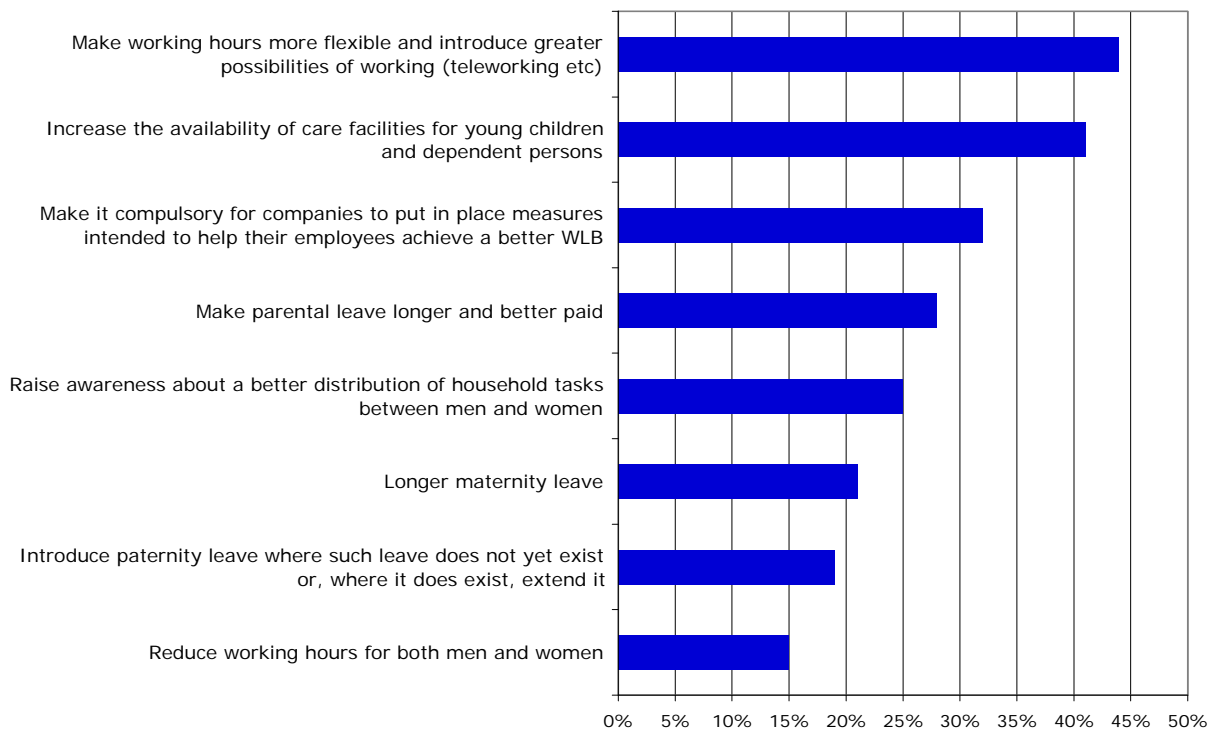


Figure 19. Which of these measures would help people to achieve a better work-life balance? – EU 27 (source: Eurobarometer 326)

In a survey carried out in the EU<sup>x</sup> in 2009 respondents in all EU countries answered questions on gender equality. A special section was devoted to work-life balance and management, in which a number of measures were proposed in order to improve work-life balance (see Figure 19).

The most important strategy is making working hours more flexible. This includes giving much greater responsibility to the employees to decide for themselves when and where they wish to work, even from home. This is also reflected in the Generation Ambition survey (see page 6).

Childcare, as well as care for other dependent persons, are other important measures. In many countries, one generation takes care of the next within families. Being required to take care of e.g. elderly parents implies added pressure on the working person.



Other measures, in declining order of importance (see Figure 19), make it compulsory for employers to help their employees to establish a better work-life balance, such as extended parental – maternity and paternity – leave, sharing household chores more equally and reduced working hours for both men and women.

Not surprisingly, different countries and different socio-economic groups prefer different strategies. First, let us look at some national differences.

### *National differences in work-life management strategies*

The Finns, the Swedes and the Hungarians are most in favour of more flexible working hours (see Figure 20). The Danes, the Dutch and the British are also in favour of this option (but not shown in the figures). The Germans prefer better care facilities for children and dependent persons (as do the French, the Austrians and the Italians). This is not so surprising, considering that such measures do exist in these countries, however, not to a great extent. It can be interpreted that they would like to expand their systems they find good.

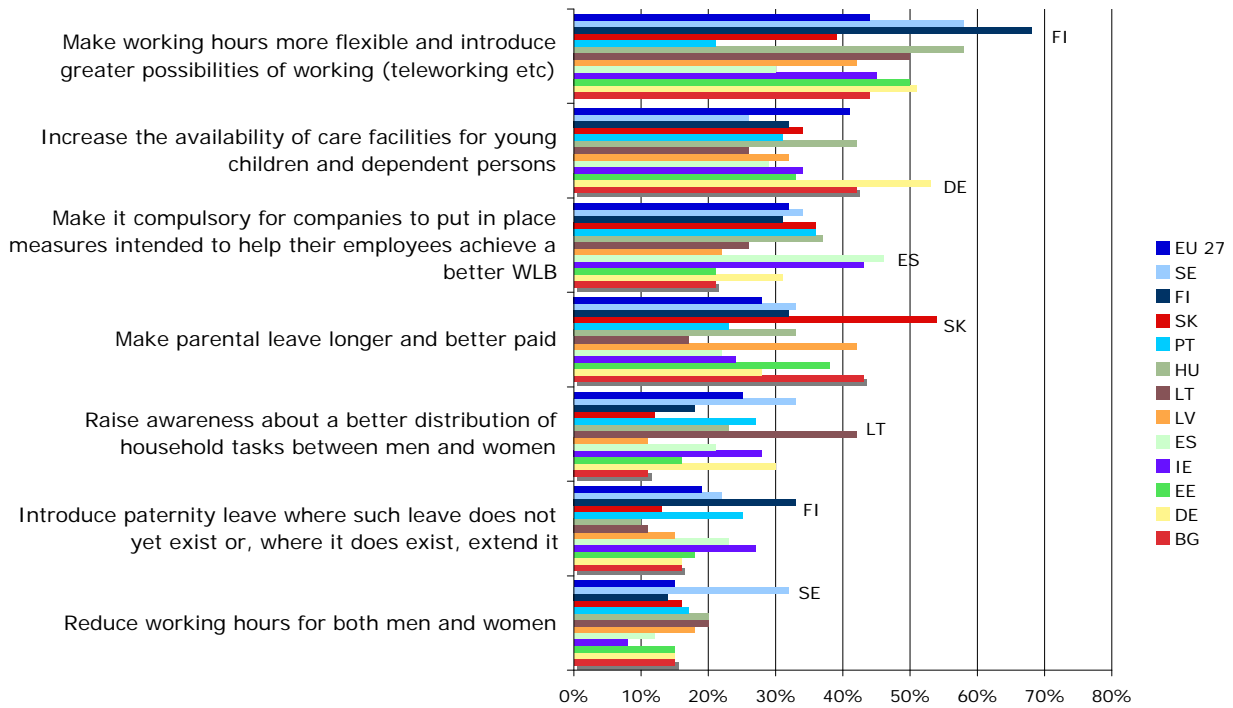


Figure 20. Which of these measures would help people to achieve a better work-life balance? – EU 27 compared to selected countries (source: Gender Equality in the EU)

The Estonians and the Irish want it to be compulsory for employers to help them with work-life management. In Slovakia (and in Greece, Bulgaria, Latvia and Romania) the respondents are very much in favour of longer and better paid parental leave – a measure the Irish value pretty low.

Except for Sweden, there seem to be few in favour of reducing working hours for men and women as a means to help manage their work-life balance.





## Employment level differences

As shown in Figure 21, different employment groups have different views on measures to enhance work-life management. Managers and white-collar workers are most in favour of flexible working hours and greater choices when it comes to planning their work themselves. In general such people have better possibilities to plan their own work. Employees strongly favour longer and better paid parental leave, no matter whether they are white-collar workers or manual labourers. Managers and self-employed people don't place such a high value on this aspect.

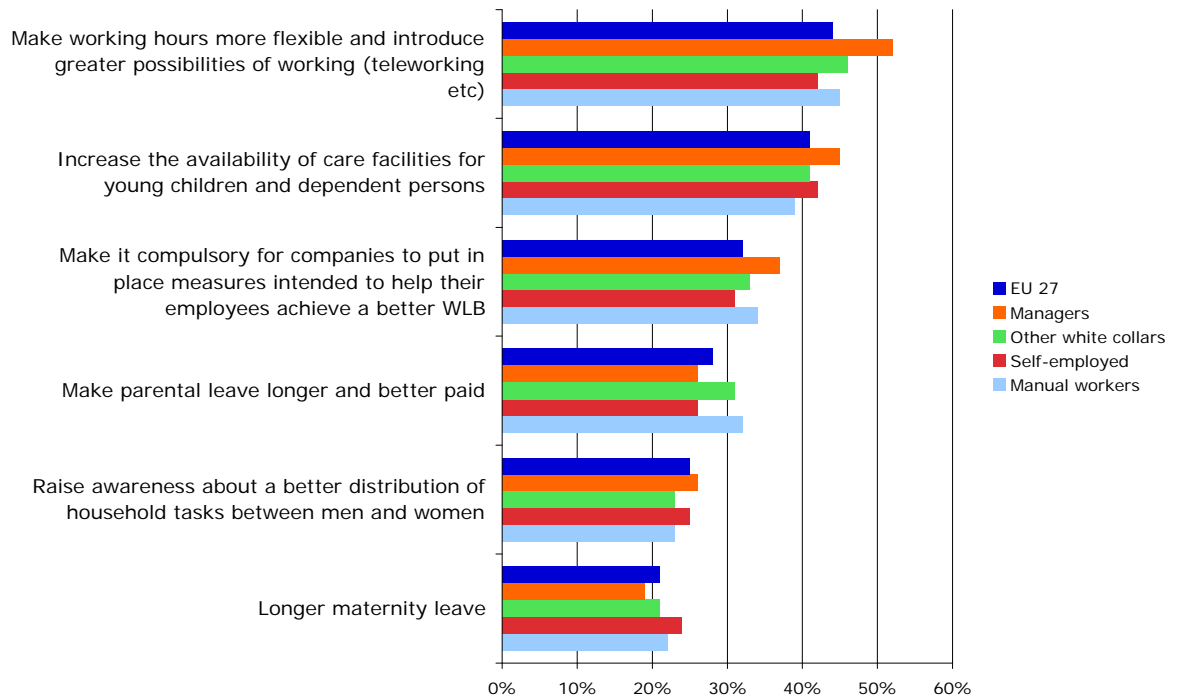


Figure 21. Which of these measures would help people to achieve a better work-life balance? – EU 27 compared by employment categories (source: Gender Equality in the EU)

The overall order of importance of these proposed measures is the same as for the EU 27 in general.



# THE RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

The findings of this report suggest both that the issue of work-life balance is important and that work-life management can be achieved. This means that there are also a number of success factors that can be applied to different aspects of life. As pointed out before in this report, we divide life into three 'rooms': the 'inner room', the 'living room' and the 'work room'. In this closing section we will outline some possible recipes for success in these three rooms.

## The holy trinity (plus one) of the workplace

There are three aspects of the workplace that are crucial for people to achieve work-life balance and live up to their high ambitions in life. A fourth dimension is also vital to these three aspects (see Figure 22).



Figure 22. The trinity (or quartet) of a successful 'work room'

- *Influence:* Being able to exert an influence on one's manner of working is a key factor to achieving work-life balance. This includes a good equilibrium between responsibility and authority and having the power to sort out problems that arise in one's work, but also such factors as being able to leave work early when necessary.
- *Affirmation:* Being shown appreciation and recognition in the workplace is crucial. But 'praise' is not enough – this factor also entails receiving clear and constructive feedback, both from managers and colleagues.
- *Commitment:* In today's workplace inspiration and stimulation are indispensable elements. A positive work environment and stimulating work give one energy and make it easier to get through periods of heavy workloads.
- *Leadership:* The employee's relationship with his or her superior is crucial. Trust in the manager is a vital aspect of work-life balance, as well as job satisfaction and the chances that individuals may change jobs, or call in sick.

## All you need is love

### (and a fair sharing of duties)

A long-term relationship with a partner has a strong, positive impact on life satisfaction in general. The proportion that is satisfied with life among those who live with a partner is about 20 percent higher than for single people. But just 'having a partner' is not enough in



order to achieve a greater work-life balance and become a 'high achiever'. For the relationship to have a positive impact on all aspects of life, three elements are crucial:

- Feeling appreciated and loved.
- Being able to turn to one's partner for support when facing problems and difficulties in life.
- Perceiving the relationship as equal and the sharing of domestic chores as fair.

Those who have a relationship in which all these criteria are met feel greater life satisfaction, greater work-life balance and find it easier to fulfil their ambitions in life. This is true regardless of what life is like otherwise. Interestingly, having children seems to have much less of an impact on general life satisfaction than a long-term relationship with a partner.

## Can't buy me love – but maybe happiness?

It seems that money can actually buy happiness, or at least provide some balance in life. A significant trait of the 'overstretched', that is, people who have high ambitions in life but fail to realize them, is financial stress. Well over half (58%) of the 'overstretched' say they worry about their financial position and almost half (45%) say that they could not cope, or would have a hard time coping, with an unforeseen expenditure of around €2,000.00 without applying for a loan. The same figures for 'high achievers' are 49% and 36% respectively.

## Be healthy but no superman

Besides having the right environment at work and being in a loving relationship, what characterizes people who manage their work-life puzzle well?

- ***Want to be a superman? Then don't try to be superman!***  
One factor that stands out clearly is not being afraid to ask for help. This is true both in one's professional and private life. People who admit that they frequently ask for help when they run into difficulties at work, as well as in life in general, are much more often 'high achievers', meaning that they manage to live up to their high ambitions more so than others.
- It is also very important to find time for rest and recovery. Unfortunately, when it comes to the workplace, this is something that many people struggle with. Less than half of the white-collar workers in the Generation Ambition survey reported having sufficient time for rest and recovery at work.
- ***Exercise for achievement.***  
The fact that most of today's high-skilled work is brainwork rather than physical work does not lessen the need for physical exercise – quite the contrary. In fact, among people who say that they exercise regularly, as many as 85% feel that they generally manage to live up to their ambitions in life. For people who do not exercise at all, the figure stands at only 52%.
- ***One's heart has to be in it.***  
One thing that sets high achievers apart from others is that their ideals and convictions are important for giving meaning to their lives. They also feel that their lives are filled with purpose. Achieving this is of course easier said than done, but it underlines the need for finding significance in work, as well as in life in general.

## HOW SHOULD EMPLOYERS ACT?

Creating a stimulating workplace is by far the most significant step employers can take to attract – and retain – the best employees. The key aspects of job satisfaction are feeling that one can exert an influence on one's work, is inspired and recognized. But there is a life outside work as well. In a nutshell, the following aspects stand out as crucial for the successful workplace of the future:



## ***1. Stimulation before structure***

Stimulation is a prime factor. Structure is irrelevant unless the job is stimulating. This is the overall conclusion of what brings about happiness in life and work. This proves that 'life' at work is important. While structure is important, structure without life is dead, and dead workplaces kill commitment and happiness.

The most basic prerequisite for creating a workplace with happy employees is to provide successful solutions to life's soft questions. Examples include creating a stimulating environment that is characterized by influence, recognition and inspiration. While structural factors might increase job satisfaction, stimulation remains the most important factor of all!

## ***2. Prioritize leadership that is based on trust***

Most people realize that managers are important components of an organization. Our survey showed that this is very true. Trust in one's immediate superior is particularly critical for high achieving and ambitious employees. Trust not only has an effect on satisfaction and the likelihood of changing jobs. It is also strongly related to absenteeism due to illness. Organizations could lower their number of sick days and cut back on staff turnover by hiring managers that are trusted by the employees.

Merely employing good managers is therefore insufficient. And apart from earning the trust of the employees, they should also be able to build good relationships with them. Employees want to be seen and heard and they want to feel that they matter. We want managers who are interested in our work and in us.

An environment that is conducive to good feedback often fosters trust in one's superior. This is an essential element of job satisfaction. Employees feel that they can turn to their superior for support, which is important to create a healthy workplace. This is particularly important in workplaces that have many problems and therefore run the risk of losing employees. Developing various means of support is crucial in this kind of organization. Examples include professional support, but they should primarily focus on support from colleagues and good leadership. Support can be developed quickly to solve any immediate problems.

## ***3. Flexible hours – for real!***

High achievers frequently have jobs with flexible hours. However, many organizations are still slaves to the clock. Officially they might have 'flexible hours', but any employees who are not in the office between 9 and 5 are viewed with suspicion. Businesses need to create a culture in which the working hours are truly flexible!

Organizations should therefore try to establish a system that will allow employees to work when and where they please, provided that they get the job done. This kind of positive and permissive environment requires a good relationship between superiors and employees, creates a good atmosphere and contributes to retaining high performing employees. It also requires solid infrastructure and support systems, such as IT and telephone systems.

## ***4. Encourage employees to take care of themselves and their families!***

Being physically active is very important. High performers, i.e., those who have the ability to fulfil their ambitions, are more likely to exercise regularly. They are also better at organizing their leisure time, looking after their health and valuing their looks. Although nobody becomes a high achiever merely through good looks and working out at the gym, taking care of one's health is important in today's high-paced society. If employers want to support and retain these high achievers, they need to create a culture in the workplace in which it is acceptable to take time off for oneself and not always put work first.

This is also true when it comes to devoting time to one's own family, something any modern employer should encourage. Employees with happy relationships and harmonious family lives are more likely to stay with the company and perform well.



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## END NOTES

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- x Gender Equality in the EU in 2009, Special Eurobarometer 326 / Wave 72.2 – TNS Opinion & Social.  
The data in Figure 19, Figure 20, and Figure 21, are drawn from this survey