



Cordant  
*People*

Work Life Balance  
**2016**



# Content

To live well is to work well

Denmark ranks first (OECD) in work-life balance

Work should be output based, not face-time based

The stress of work - should stay at work

Conclusion



# To live well is to work well

Work-life balance literally means prioritising between work (career and ambition) on the one hand and life (health, pleasure, leisure, spirituality and family) on the other.

When workers are balanced and happy, they are more productive and tasks are completed more efficiently – and are of higher quality. However, one in three full-time employees in some of the world's largest economies say maintaining a healthy work-life balance has become more difficult in the last five years. Overwork creates huge surges of adrenaline, which floods the body and taxes every physical function.

In 2016, employers will witness many changes in the ever-evolving workplace and companies must retain their valuable skilled staff but also attract new talent - particularly the younger generation entering the workforce because the workplace dynamic is changing!

The younger generation entering the workforce now expects more flexibility for working arrangements and addressing work-life balance therefore becomes essential in terms of employment branding and being regarded as an employer of choice in order to attract the best talent. Poor work-life balance has a negative impact on both employee and business.



# To live well is to work well

## Work-life balance is vital in today's business world

A workaholic society is taking its toll on individuals - working constantly affects a person's social life, personal relations and most importantly health. There is a strong relationship between work-related stress and mental ill-health - excessive and persistent stress can trigger and escalate mental illness.

Psychological problems that are frequently brought on by work-related stress include: fatigue, low self-esteem, irritability, depressive and acute anxiety disorders.

Workplace stress is costly and is now at epidemic proportions, it affects people differently, is difficult to measure but has a troubled relationship with both ill-health and unhappiness - work life balance has never been more important.

## Work better, yes, not longer

There is constant pressure for employees to stay connected after normal working hours - but research indicates that long hours result in less productivity. Cell-phones, emails and video conferences make it increasingly more difficult to leave work at the office, but working longer hours does not necessarily mean working better - it can even have the opposite effect.

We live in a culture that is particularly demanding but as work takes up more and more time, self-care decreases and the potential for illness increases; society has become a fast-track of over achievers - at a price! Over work affects every part of a person's health, as a workaholic eventually becomes out of touch with their body.

Long working hours and highly stressful jobs not only hamper ability to harmonise work and family life but are also associated with health risks, such as increased smoking and alcohol consumption, weight gain and depression.

# To live well is to work well

## A workaholic will die faster than an alcoholic

Stress weakens the immune system and makes a person susceptible to heart disease, also recent research shows that chronic stress can double the risk of a heart attack. People spend most of their daily life carrying out their job and work for a significant part of their life. Hence, the kind of jobs they have matters a great deal for their well-being.

Severe fatigue is a symptom of depression - excessive pumping of adrenalin produces a fatigue that should act as a circuit breaker to warn of danger to all the body's functioning systems, but workaholics push themselves excessively until chronic fatigue burns them out.

Workaholism is slowly becoming unattractive but becoming more recognised as an insidious problem that can have life-threatening consequences. Whether therapists consider workaholism an illness, an addiction, or a symptom, they do, however, agree on one thing - it is unhealthy and because there is less of a social stigma attached to workaholism than to other addictions, health symptoms can easily go undiagnosed and neglected.

The ability to be able to identify common stress symptoms can give a person a head start on managing them, as stress that is left untreated will eventually cause health problems, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity and diabetes.



# Denmark ranks first (OECD) in work-life balance

People in the workforce are more stressed than ever - but not globally. Scandinavian countries lead the way when it comes to work life balance: Denmark, Norway and Sweden being in the top 6 countries. At the top of the OECD's (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development) work-life balance list is Denmark, followed by Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Norway and Sweden.

- Denmark - only 2% of people in full-time employment work very long hours.
- Workers in Spain devote 16.1 hours, or 67% of their day, to "personal care" and leisure activities.
- Only 0.5% of workers in the Netherlands work very long hours. High levels of gender equality mean men and women share work responsibilities and families are helped by generous state benefits.
- Only 5% of Belgium employees working very long hours.
- Norway & Sweden - only about 3% work very long hours.

The Danish welfare society is characterized by quality of life and a good work-life balance. Denmark also ranks above the average of the 36 OECD countries in the dimensions of social connections, subjective well-being, environmental quality, civic engagement, education and skills, jobs and earnings, income and wealth, housing, personal security, and health status. Denmark also has the lowest child poverty among developed nations.

- Danes work 1563 hours a year, lower than the OECD average of 1739 hours
- The official working week is 37 hours
- People in Denmark devote 68% of their day, or 16.3 hours, to personal care
- 78% of Danish mothers are employed after their children begin school, higher than the OECD average of 66%
- Denmark has the highest life satisfaction in the OECD.

## OECD - Other Countries

In the United Kingdom, some 13% of employees work long hours, in line with the OECD average. Overall, more men work very long hours; in the United Kingdom 19% of men work very long hours, compared with 6% for women.

Work life balance - UK ranked 24th out of 36 countries.

Employees working long hours ranked 28th out of 36 countries.

Americans work 137 more hours per year than Japanese workers, 260 more hours per year than British workers, and 499 more hours per year than French workers. The US ranks 29th out of the 36 countries and ranking below the US are Australia, Japan, Israel, Korea, Chile, Mexico, and Turkey.

# Work should be output based, not face-time based

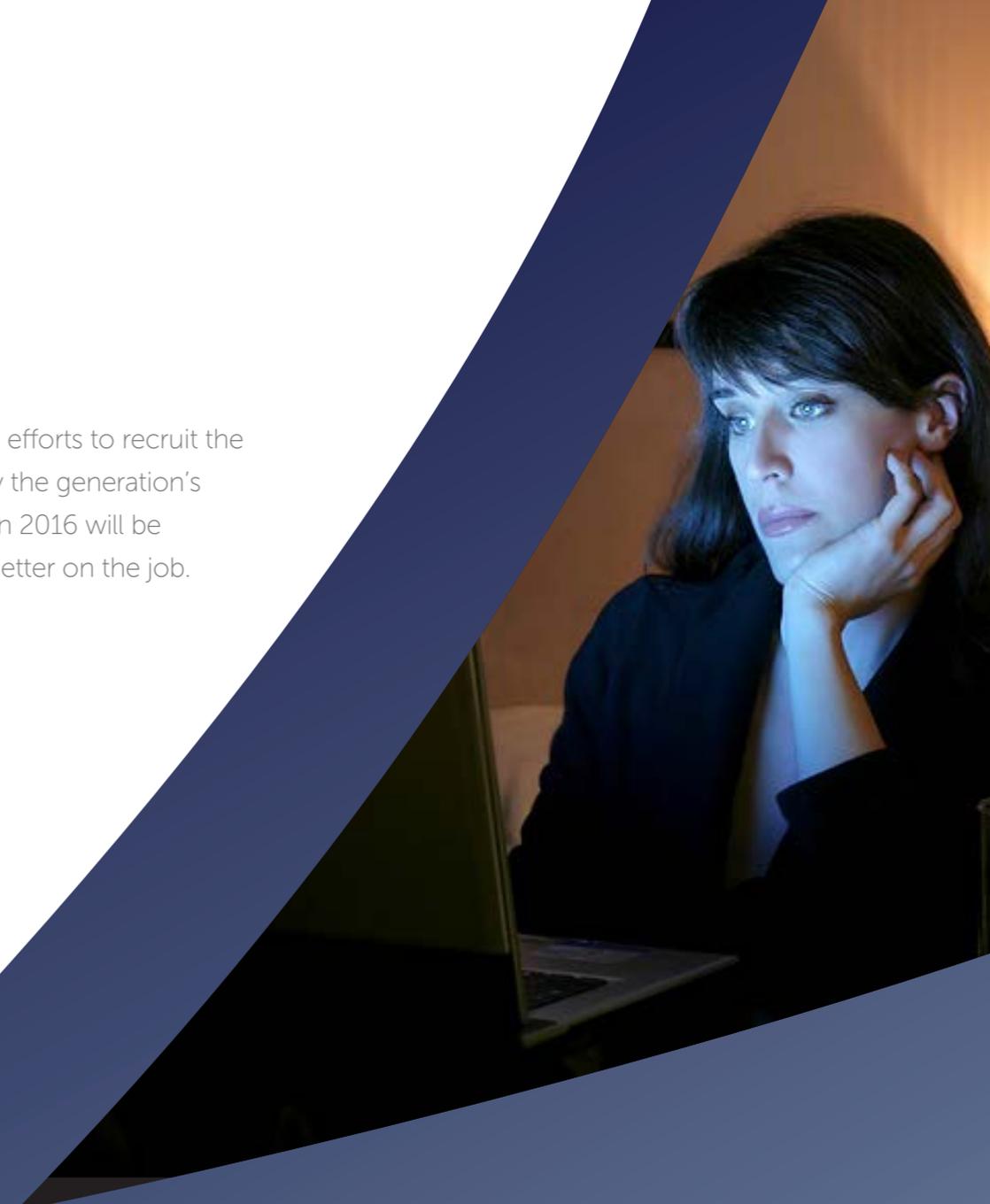
Millennials insist on work-life balance and companies will be forced to accommodate their demands in efforts to recruit the best talent, therefore 2016 will see more companies introducing workplace flexibility initiatives to satisfy the generation's cultural expectation that one should not have to sacrifice his or her personal life for work. Companies in 2016 will be forced to strive for a shared understanding that employees with a healthier work-life balance perform better on the job.

## Workaholic Culture

Working after normal working hours has become the new norm, as a result of increased technology to constant connectivity as well as career insecurity - but are people working themselves to death? Workaholics can suffer from a host of stress disorders, including anxiety attacks, ulcers, and burnout.

An estimated 1,000 people a year die of karoshi in Japan, some in their thirties. Karoshi is a legally accepted phenomenon - people just dropping dead at their desks, their hearts calling it quits.

In China, the comparable term is guolaosi, and the statistical impact is even more staggering - according to one estimate, overwork kills 600,000 Chinese per year.



# Work should be output based, not face-time based

## Workaholics prefer work to leisure

Research indicates that marriages with at least one workaholic partner are 40 percent more likely to end in divorce. Another recent study showed that people who are over-worked are as much as 80 percent more likely to develop heart disease.

## Working around the clock leads to poor exercise and eating habits

Workaholism influences aspects like job stress, greater work-life conflict, decreased physical health, and job burnout. Workaholics can develop a chemical dependency. The sympathetic nervous system creates a stress response that leads the body to secrete adrenaline, cortisol, and other hormones. Over time, the sustained rush of stress hormones can lead to clogged arteries and high blood pressure, heightening the risks of stroke and heart failure.

## Workaholism means a person values work over any other activity

Workaholics can be difficult to get along with, because they frequently push others as hard as they push themselves but, also, they should not be confused with people who are simply hard workers - a workaholic cannot stop. If a person is an alcoholic - they will feel guilty about having a drink - the same is so for a workaholic they become to feel guilty when relaxing and not working.



# The stress of work - should stay at work

Employees become stressed when there is a mismatch between the requirements of a specific job and the practical capabilities of a worker.

Because people are, today more than ever, concerned about losing their jobs they are putting in more hours at home and as a result of technology making themselves constantly available, but this means increased stress at home. Society has slowly become obsessed with work worry and stress amongst employees has grown immensely in the past few years.

There is a strong connection between work-related stress and mental ill-health, as too much stress will eventually cause psychological problems, fatigue, low self-esteem, irritability, anxiety and depression. Basic necessities start to lose priority - causing further damage to an individual.

When a person is under continuous pressure and is unable to cope they will quickly become stressed, and will neglect other matters but eating well and relaxing will contribute to limiting a person's health problems and will consequently make them a more efficient worker during working hours.

## Effects of stress build up over time

Over the long term, people who react more to stress have a higher risk of cardiovascular disease and work overload is a quick way to develop stress, furthermore as work increases it becomes a part of everyday life - which is wrongly acknowledged as a normal aspect of life. However, correctly managing work in order to get a good sense of control is a vital step - it is critical to plan and maintain a balance in life.

# Conclusion

It is imperative to constantly monitor and maintain the correct balance.

Employers are becoming increasingly concerned with the implications of overworked employees such as: lower productivity, absenteeism, less commitment and engagement as well as overall performance.

Employees are now looking for employers who offer a better work-life balance and research indicates that employees work harder for those companies that encourage work-life balance; as they recognise that balance is important as it allows a person to separate work and home, it also helps a person function at their best.

## Work-life balance for today's employers is a crucial consideration

Employees who feel over-worked by their jobs will inevitably become less efficient, less productive, and less innovative. The promotion of work-life balance minimises the stress felt by employees but most importantly it shows employees that the company they work for is paying attention to the well-being of their staff and to the important aspects of their lives.

Employers will greatly benefit from addressing work-life balance issues with their employees, as this creates a culture of open-mindedness and flexibility - and as such employers are allowing their employees to have a voice "a measure of control" over when, where and how they work - thus it is respecting the employee for the benefit of both business and society. Work-life balance does, of course, change over the natural course of a person's life.



# Conclusion

Work-life balance is about improving people's quality of life; a balance where work interacts positively with all other activities important in life, such as family time, self-development, relaxation, voluntary work - community participation as well as care responsibilities. (The population is ageing and more workers will have parent-care issues.)

By encouraging work-life balance initiatives companies will be tackling skill shortages and keeping valuable employees in work longer, which will enhance general skill development for younger workers and ease barriers to workforce participation.

## Work-life balance will benefit employers by:

- Increase employee retention
- Attract the best talent
- Promote employee loyalty
- Minimise absenteeism
- Develop innovation, increase productivity as well as company profits
- Become recognised as an employer of choice

Work-life balance is central to positive flexibility in the organisation of work and although companies have no legal obligations to offer flexible working hours or indeed practices, they may choose to accommodate the requirements of employees in order to retain and attract the best employees.





**Cordant**  
*People*

Supporting local businesses with  
their employment needs.

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