EMPLOYEE PREFERENCES FOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE INITIATIVES IN A LARGE NEW ZEALAND CONSTRUCTION COMPANY

Emily Jane Morrison
Student Identification Number: 1338206

A Report for Industry Project CONS 7819
Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Construction, Unitec New Zealand.

Department of Construction
October 2010
ABSTRACT

Work-life balance initiatives are often provided by companies to counter the prevalence of work-life conflict stemming from today’s societal pressures. The construction industry can be a high pressure, high stress industry demanding long working hours, and it is posited that work-life balance initiatives are important for the future sustainability of the industry. Relatively little is known regarding the types of initiatives employees within the New Zealand construction industry prefer. The study’s objectives are to (1) rank and compare preferences for work-life balance initiatives of employees within a large New Zealand construction company and compare these results with those of a similar Australian study (Lingard and Francis, 2005) and (2) use the demographic information gathered to define typical working hours. The survey method incorporating an electronic questionnaire enabled the collection of a cross-section of wide-ranging, empirical data from a large number of respondents in a relatively short amount of time. Elicited data included demographic information, employee preference ratings for work-life balance initiatives and two, qualitative, open ended questions. The results show that employees are interested in a variety of work-life balance initiatives and do have concerns regarding different issues around work-life balance. Findings support the notion that there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ policy appropriate for all companies or group of employees and that the provision of a wide variety of initiatives from which employees can choose during different stages in their life and career is ideal. Furthermore, it was found that a significant portion of employees work very long hours and that working hours vary significantly depending on job role and location. Qualitative results suggest that there is some work-life conflict associated with working long hours and weekend work. In order to attract and maintain valuable employees, it is important that the industry continually strives to provide useful work-life balance initiatives, reasonable working hours for its employees, and supportive workplace cultures in line with such initiatives. Further study could address whether or not employees feel organisational culture, supervisors and managers support the initiatives provided within their company. A sub-research question could investigate whether employees are aware of all available initiatives and how they are used.
CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

The author has agreed that all personal and company names of participants in this research will be kept confidential. The responses collected are anonymous. The identity of respondents is not able to be deciphered and the responses cannot be linked to individuals involved. This was ensured by selecting the option to not collect IP addresses when using the online survey tool and by not requesting participants’ names. Furthermore, the demographic questions were optional in the event they were not comfortable sharing such information.
PUBLICATION AGREEMENT

I agree that the Unitec Library and Department of Construction may make a hard copy or digital copy of this thesis available for the purposes of research or private study, provided that due acknowledgement is made where appropriate and that the author’s permission is obtained before any material from the thesis is published.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to those involved with helping me complete this research project as follows:

~ my supervisor, Derek Thurnell, for his constructive, timely, and thorough critique of each chapter and feedback throughout the entire research process;

~ my employer for endorsing the research project which involved employees within the organisation and for supporting my academic studies;

~ my supervisors at work for their supportiveness during my studies;

~ all of the research participants who kindly took time out of their day to complete the questionnaire;

~ the teachers and colleagues involved with the group presentations for their involvement and helpful feedback; and

~ all other friends, family, and co-workers who provided support and expressed interest in one way or another throughout the research process
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUBLICATION AGREEMENT</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 WORK-LIFE BALANCE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 RESEARCH</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 REPORT STRUCTURE</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 WORK-LIFE BALANCE</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1 Definition</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.2 The concept of work-life balance</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.3 Criticisms</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 WORK-LIFE IMBALANCE</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN NEW ZEALAND</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.1 Interested Parties</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.2 Research</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 WORK-LIFE BALANCE INITIATIVES</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.1 Categories</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.2 Positive Effects</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.3 Negative Effects</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.4 Utilization gap</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.5 Barriers to uptake</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.6 Organisations</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN CONSTRUCTION</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 SUMMARY</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.1 Lingard and Francis' (2005) research</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 CURRENT RESEARCH</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1 Type of research</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2 Type of data collection</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.3 Reliability and validity</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.4 Research Ethics</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.5 The questionnaire</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.6 SurveyMonkey</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.7 Data collection</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.8 Data analysis</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 SUMMARY</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 DATA</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 RESPONSES</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 DEMOGRAPHICS</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 OVERALL PREFERENCE SCORES</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.1 Work-life balance initiatives</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.2 Work-life balance initiative factors</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

vi
LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1  RESPONDENT PREFERENCES FOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE INITIATIVES BY AGE COHORT (n=121) ...................... 45

FIGURE 2  RESPONDENT PREFERENCES FOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE INITIATIVES BY GENDER (n=121) ......................... 46

FIGURE 3  RESPONDENT PREFERENCES FOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE INITIATIVES BY WORK LOCATION (n=121) ............... 47

FIGURE 4  HOURS WORKED PER WEEK BY QUANTITY SURVEYORS, ESTIMATORS, AND COMMERCIAL MANAGERS .......... 48

FIGURE 5  HOURS WORKED PER WEEK BY PROJECT/ CONSTRUCTION/SITE/PACKAGE MANAGERS & PROJECT LEADERS . 48

FIGURE 6  HOURS WORKED PER WEEK BY HEAD OFFICE EMPLOYEES ................................................................. 49

FIGURE 7  HOURS WORKED PER WEEK BY SITE-BASED EMPLOYEES ........................................................................... 49

FIGURE 8  REPRODUCED FROM CHAPTER 4, RESPONDENT PREFERENCES FOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE INITIATIVES FACTORS BY AGE COHORT (n=121) .................................................................................................................. 61

FIGURE 9  ADAPTED FROM LINGARD AND FRANCIS (2005), RESPONDENT PREFERENCES FOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE INITIATIVE FACTORS BY AGE COHORT (n=202) ................................................................. 61

FIGURE 10  REPRODUCED FROM CHAPTER 4, RESPONDENT PREFERENCES FOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE INITIATIVE FACTORS BY GENDER (n=121) .............................................................................................................. 63

FIGURE 11  ADAPTED FROM LINGARD AND FRANCIS (2005), RESPONDENT PREFERENCES FOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE INITIATIVE FACTORS BY GENDER (n=202) ............................................................. 63
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1  Demographic characteristics of sample (N=121) ................................................................. 40
Table 2  Work-life balance initiative preferences rankings (N=121) ...................................................... 43
Table 3  Work-life balance initiative factor preferences mean scores (N=121) ...................................... 44
Table 4  Work-life balance initiative factor preferences mean scores for different age cohorts (N=121) 45
Table 5  Work-life balance initiative factor preferences mean scores for different genders (N=121) .... 46
Table 6  Work-life balance initiative factor preferences mean scores for different work locations (N=121) ................................................................. 47
Table 7  Hours worked per week by job role (N=121) ............................................................................. 48
Table 8  Hours worked per week by location (N=121) ............................................................................. 49
Table 9  Frequency of suggestions for additional work-life balance initiatives and comments (N=121) 51
Table 10 Work-life balance initiative factor preferences mean scores .................................................. 59
Table 11 Adapted from Lingard and Francis (2005) Work-life balance initiative factor preferences mean scores .............................................................................. 59
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to the research topic and an explanation of why the current research is important. The chapter highlights the purpose of the study and introduces the research questions. The report structure is also explained.

1.2 Work-life balance

The New Zealand Department of Labour (n.d.-a) asserts work-life balance “is about effectively managing the juggling act between paid work and other activities that are important to us – including spending time with family, taking part in sport and recreation, volunteering or undertaking further study” (p. 1). The topic of work-life balance, which has been developing for decades, has recently gained much attention with an abundance of research being carried out in the field. Within the past decade, the Department of Labour has sponsored work-life balance research, developed the Work-Life Balance Project, and published recommendations and guidelines for employers regarding undertaking workplace practices for supporting work-life balance (Department of Labour, n.d.-b).

Similar to international reasons for focus on work-life balance, New Zealand’s interest in the topic stems from shifting societal norms. For some time society has been shifting away from the traditional male breadwinner model of work, and dual-earner households have become the norm where both partners work and contribute to family responsibilities. This has lead to an overall decrease in the amount of time available for households to fulfil responsibilities and maintain free time outside of work. The percentage of single parents in the workforce has also risen, and an ageing population has resulted in an increase in elderly care demands. Furthermore, work intensification has increased pressures within the workplace. Due to these cultural shifts, pressures in both work and life outside of work are at an all time high. In response to pressures stemming from these issues, work-life balance initiatives have been increasingly offered by employers in an attempt to help alleviate work-life conflict, support work-life balance, and attract and maintain valuable employees.
Due to the nature of construction projects, the construction industry can be a particularly challenging industry in which to work. Jobs can be highly stressful considering such pressures as achieving tight programme deadlines, meeting the needs of multiple stakeholders, dealing with disputes, and maintaining the safety of all individuals onsite. Furthermore, long working hours and weekend work is an integral part of many jobs in the industry. Considering that many of these job characteristics are linked to work-life conflict, it is posited that it is important for the future sustainability of the construction industry to undertake initiatives to support employee work-life balance.

1.3 Research

There appears to be a lack of research regarding which types of work-life balance initiatives employees in the New Zealand construction industry prefer. One particular Australian study assesses employee preferences for work-life balance initiatives in two construction companies and suggests further study be carried out in other countries (Lingard & Francis, 2005). Therefore, the researcher would like to further the research as suggested by Lingard and Francis (2005) so that the needs of employees in the New Zealand construction industry are better understood. This research will address the question: What are employees’ preferences for work-life balance initiatives in a large construction company in New Zealand? In addition, since much of the work-life balance research in the construction industry focuses on working hours and suggests long working hours without long breaks adversely affects the ability to achieve work-life balance, a sub-research topic will address the question: What working hours do employees carry out in a large New Zealand construction company?

This study will add to the body of knowledge in the field of work-life balance in particular regarding employee preferences for work-life balance initiatives and typical working hours within the New Zealand construction industry. The study is of significance as no other similar research specific to the construction industry in New Zealand appears to have been carried out. The value of the research lies in helping people within the construction industry better understand the wants and needs of employees. It is logical to assume that the better industry employees are understood and supported, the better and more efficient the industry becomes.
1.4 Report structure

The structure of this research report is outlined here.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature around the topic of work-life balance and more specifically work-life balance initiatives with a focus on the construction industry in New Zealand.

Chapter 3 presents a review of the research methodology used to answer the research questions. The previous research on which this study is based is described followed by an explanation of the type of research and data collection used and why. The chapter also addresses reliability, validity, and research ethics.

Chapter 4 presents the collected survey data. The survey findings are compiled and presented in relation to the research question and sub-question.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings and relates the findings to the extant literature. The quantitative and qualitative data are triangulated giving a more in-depth understanding of the findings.

Chapter 6 summarises the research findings and implications, highlights limitations of the study, and suggests areas for future research.

Appendix A includes the questionnaire.

Appendices B, C, and D include the content of the following emails: invitation, endorsement from the company, and closing date reminder.

Appendix E contains the Lingard and Francis’ (2005) research report, on which this study is based.
2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The field of work-life balance is vast. Work-life research spans a wide array of disciplines such as sociology, psychology, organisational behaviour, human development, labour economics, industrial relations, management, demography, and women’s studies (Bardoel, De Cieri, & Santos, 2008). There has been a wealth of research undertaken on the topic over the past 30 years; hence, it is not reasonable to review the entire body of work-life research here.

With a focus on the construction industry in New Zealand, a review of the literature around the topic of work-life balance and more specifically work-life balance initiatives is presented in Chapter 2. First, an overview of work-life balance and the issues surrounding the topic is presented. Then the causes and effects of a lack of work-life balance are identified. Next the focus is narrowed to work-life balance in New Zealand and in the construction industry and the topic of work-life balance initiatives is reviewed.

2.2 Work-life balance

2.2.1 Definition

Work-life balance “is about effectively managing the juggling act between paid work and other activities that are important to us – including spending time with family, taking part in sport and recreation, volunteering or undertaking further study” (Department of Labour, n.d.-a, p. 1).

Similarly, work-life balance is:

about people having a measure of control over when, where and how they work. It is achieved when an individual's right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as the norm, to the mutual benefit of the individual, business and society. (The Work Foundation, 2008)
2.2.2 The concept of work-life balance

The concept of balance between work and non-work has existed for centuries and studies in the work and family domain date back to 1949 (MacDermid, 2004 as cited in Bardoel et al., 2008). In the 1960s and early 70s the concept mainly focused on working mothers (Lewis, Gambles, & Rapoport, 2007). Extensive development in the field occurred in the 70s and 80s contributing to an understanding of the interaction between work and family (Bardoel et al., 2008). In the 1980’s the topic began expanding to include men, organisations, and communities and some forward-thinking organisations began implementing work-life balance initiatives (Kossek, Lewis, & Hammer, 2010). Increasingly research focused on topics such as stress and burnout contributing to work-family conflict in the 80s and 90s (Lewis et al., 2007). Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, it has become accepted that the concept of work-life balance is important for most people (Bardoel et al., 2008) although since it is such a wide reaching subject much debate abounds around the topic.

Work-life balance has evolved into the subject that it is today in response to a changing culture where work has become more demanding of both sexes and free time has become less available, in turn increasing pressures in both domains causing endemic work-life imbalance (Dallimore & Mickel, 2006; Families and Work Institute, 2008b; Lewis et al., 2007). Rates of employment have increased for women and remained constant for men resulting in less time available outside of work. U.S. workplace data shows 55% of employees feel they do not have enough personal time, and approximately 65% feel they do not have enough time for their families (Families and Work Institute, 2008b). Consequently, terms such as ‘the time squeeze’ and ‘time famine’ are being used to describe the current lack of time (Lewis et al., 2007).

For some time society has been shifting away from the traditional male breadwinner model of work (Brough, Holt, Bauld, Biggs, & Ryan, 2008) and dual-earner households have become the norm (Families and Work Institute, 2008b) where both partners work and contribute to family responsibilities (Greenhouse et al. as cited in Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005; Families and Work Institute, 2008b). The National Study of the Changing Workforce (2008b) shows young women and men both equally want jobs with the same level of responsibility and men are contributing more to family and home responsibilities. Increasingly, the younger
generation of workers expect more flexible working arrangements and are more mindful of not over committing themselves and achieving work-life balance (Lingard & Francis, 2004b). The percentage of single parents in the workforce has also risen (Families and Work Institute, 2008b). An ageing population has resulted in an increase in elderly care demands (Drucker, 2001; Patrickson and Hartmann, 1998 as cited in De Cieri, Holmes, Abbott, & Pettit, 2005). Furthermore, work intensification has increased the pressures within the workplace (McPherson & Reed, 2007). Due to these societal shifts, pressures in both work and life outside of work are at an all time high (Bardoe1, Simon, Kosmas, & Phyllis, 1999).

It should be noted that although much work-life research addresses issues relating to being overworked, work-life imbalance can also stem from not having enough work (McPherson & Reed, 2007).

The right work-life balance is different for everybody depending on their circumstances, personality, desires, and stage in life (Department of Labour, n.d.-c; McPherson & Reed, 2007). “An individual’s experience of balance rests upon a perception of satisfactorily resolving the multiple and often incompatible demands of work and [non-work] roles” (Thornthwaite, 2004, p. 168). As the Department of Labour points out, work “shouldn’t completely crowd out the other things that matter to people, like time with family, participation in community activities, voluntary work, personal development, leisure and recreation” (Department of Labour, n.d.-c, p. 1)

Work-life balance is multifaceted and can be addressed on multiple levels (De Bruin & Dupuis, 2004). Some think it is an individual issue; some believe it is a responsibility for organisations to address; some believe it should be addressed and/or regulated by government; while some believe it is a shift in societal norms that is needed (Dallimore & Mickel, 2006; Kossek et al., 2010; Lewis et al., 2007).

2.2.3 Criticisms

Eby, et al.’s (2005) review of work-life research over the past two decades concludes work-life research has not significantly helped improve the array of work-life balance issues that are faced by employees and employers today. It has also been postulated that the provision of work-life balance programmes actually reinforce images of ideal
employees (Kossek et al., 2010). Eby et al.’s (2005) review also points out a lack of theory and model development, a lack of exploratory research, and hence a lack of understanding of why certain relationships exist (Eby et al., 2005). Another criticism is that the majority of work-life research has been undertaken in the U.S. when work-life issues “may be culture- and context-specific” (Bardoel et al., 2008, p. 319).

Considering the fact that work-life balance is a multi-levelled issue concerning individuals, supervisors, organisations and societies, there is a gap in cross-level research (Kossek et al., 2010).

Much debate also exists around the use of terminology. For a long time terms such as ‘work-family balance’ and ‘family-friendly workplace’ were used to refer to the concept. Gradually the term ‘work-life’ has started to be used in place of the term ‘work-family’ in attempt to more adequately portray a meaning that also encompasses people without typical family units (Bardoel et al., 2008; Kossek et al., 2010; Lewis et al., 2007; McPherson & Reed, 2007).

Although ‘work-life balance’ is the most widely accepted term in use today, it is still not unanimously supported. Other suggested terms for work-life balance include ‘work-life integration’, ‘work-life mosaic’, ‘work-life interface’, ‘work-life reconciliation’, ‘work-life coordination’ (McPherson & Reed, 2007), ‘work-life articulation’, and ‘socially sustainable work’ (Lewis et al., 2007). Some opponents of the term think that it creates an unnecessary perception of a duality between work and life implying they are two separate entities when in fact work is part of life (McPherson & Reed, 2007). On the other hand, the use of the term ‘work-life integration’ possibly suggests too much of a blend between work and non- work and some believe separation between the two should be kept (McPherson & Reed, 2007). It is also argued that the conceptualisation of work-life balance is not applicable to all types of people. For certain low income workers the concept of work-life balance may be unthinkable if they must struggle to find enough work to make ends meet (De Bruin & Dupuis, 2004). There is also ambiguity around the definition of work. The term work often refers to paid employment but may also refer to that which includes unpaid work at home and in the community (Eby et al., 2005).

In this paper the term work-life balance is used as it is the most accepted term at this point in time. The use of the term work in this paper refers to paid employment.
2.3 Work-life imbalance

The causes, effects, and solutions to achieving the right work-life balance for individuals, organisations, and society are multifaceted, interrelated, and still not fully understood. There has been extensive research carried out on the causes and effects of not having adequate work-life balance.

The widely accepted spillover hypothesis suggests a person’s feelings and experiences relating to one area of life spill over into, or affect, other areas of life (Brough, O'Driscoll, & Kalliath, 2005). The topic of work-family or work-life conflict looks at negative spillover between work and non-work. On the other hand, work-family or work-life facilitation has to do with positive spillover between the two, a topic on which substantially less research has been carried out.

Work-life (or work-family) conflict is defined as:

a form of inner role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and other life domains... are mutually incompatible in some respect, whereby participation in one role is made more difficult by the virtue of participation in the other (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985 as cited in De Cieri et al., 2005).

Work-life conflict can spillover in both directions and recent research has been carried out on both work-to-family and family-to-work conflict (Eby et al., 2005). Issues linked to increases in work-to-family conflict (work having a negative effect on life outside of work) include high pressure work, inflexible and unpredictable work schedules, weekend work, self-employment, disproportionate rewards at work, abusive supervision, long working hours, and highly demanding work (Eby et al., 2005). These issues can also lead to burnout, a topic related to work-life conflict (Eby et al., 2005), which is defined as “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment” (Maslach et al. 2001 as cited in Lingard, Yip, Rowlinson, & Kvan, 2007, p. 345). Looking at work-life conflict from the other direction, research shows that family-to-work conflict stems from family pressures and responsibilities such as having dependents, relationship problems, high family demands, and low family support (Eby et al., 2005).
Effects of work-life conflict can be far reaching for the individual, organisation, and community. Work-life conflict has been linked to mental and physical health problems such as anxiety, depression, decreased life satisfaction, substance abuse, hypertension, and high stress (Brough et al., 2005; Eby et al., 2005). Work-life conflict has also been related to decreased quality of work and family life as well as burnout (Eby et al., 2005). At an organisational level, work-life conflict has been linked to decreased job and career satisfaction, increased intention to quit or look for a new job, and low job performance (Eby et al., 2005). The social costs of working long hours are considerable. For example, construction industry employees working extended hours and weekends report issues such as marital problems and lack of rest, social life, and time for children (Townsend, Bailey, Brown, Bradley, & Lingard, 2006a). A lack of work-life balance is associated with a decrease in social and community engagement (Brough et al., 2008).

Because of the broad effects of work-life imbalance, it is posited that the issue must not only be addressed at an individual level but on an organisational and societal level in order to make the necessary shifts towards more sustainable employment practices (Brough et al., 2008). Government, organisations, and individuals can all plan an important role in improving work-life balance for employees. Research shows certain workplace attributes such as supportive organisational culture, work-life balance initiatives, supportive supervisors, supervisors with similar work-life structure, a sense of community and control at work, flexibility, and career advancement opportunities are all related to reduced work-life conflict (Eby et al., 2005).

2.4 Work-life balance in New Zealand

2.4.1 Interested Parties

In New Zealand, work-life balance has become a topic of interest amongst government agencies, organisations, researchers, trade unions, the media, and the general population. Similar to international reasons for focus on work-life balance, New Zealand’s interest in the topic stems from “the increase in workforce participation of women, changes in household forms, the increase of jobs in the service sector, work intensity (longer working hours), growth in part-time work and alternative work arrangements, and ageing of the population” (Bardoel et al., 2008, p. 320).
Over the past decade, many developed nations have launched work-life balance campaigns (Dallimore & Mickel, 2006; De Bruin & Dupuis, 2004). In 2003, under the umbrella of the New Zealand Department of Labour’s (n.d.-a) ‘Key Projects’, the Government established a Work-Life Balance Project which has since produced a substantial amount of research and resources on the topic (Department of Labour, 2006, 2008; Department of Labour and Families Commission, 2008; Yasbek, 2004). The Work-Life Balance Project aims to “promote policies and practices to help people to achieve a better work-life balance” (Department of Labour Work-Life Balance Project, 2004, p. 2).

Legislation also exists in NZ which helps employees achieve better work-life balance. The Holidays Act 2003 provides legislation requiring full-time employers provide a minimum of four weeks paid annual holidays, five days paid sick leave, and three days paid bereavement leave (Department of Labour, n.d.-a). The Parental Leave and Employment Relations Act and 2002/2004 amendments provide legislation giving qualifying employees rights to 14 weeks paid parental leave and allows up to 52 weeks unpaid extended parental leave for men and women (Star Run Grow Group, 2004). Most recently, the Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act came into effect in 2008 and requires employers to consider flexible working arrangements for employees with responsibilities for caring for others if requested (Department of Labour, n.d.-a).

Over a decade before the Department of Labour began their Work-Life Balance Programme, in 1992 the Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) Trust was established as a not-for-profit organisation which disseminates information to New Zealand businesses regarding the benefits of diversity in the workplace (Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, 2007a). The annual EEO Trust Work and Life Awards recognise businesses that excel in supporting work-life balance and diversity (Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, 2007a). In addition to undertaking other research (Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, 2005, 2007b), the EEO Trust administers a biannual Work-Life Survey reporting on work-life balance issues among EEO Employer Group members which provides an abundance of data regarding work-life balance in New Zealand (Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, 2008).
There are a whole host of other parties interested in work-life balance such as The New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development (2006) and The New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (2002) as well as New Zealand businesses, work-life consulting firms (see for example http://www.nzsuccess.co.nz/work_life_balance.htm), researchers, and the general public.

2.4.2 Research

Work-life balance issues in New Zealand are similar to those reported internationally.

The main themes which appeared in work-life research undertaken in New Zealand and Australia from 2004 to 2007 focus on the following: organisational approaches, workplace characteristics, specific industries, government policy and legislation, health and well-being, family structure, and gender (Bardoel et al., 2008).

Interestingly, 8 of the 18 articles of the specific industry papers focused on the construction industry due to the substantial amount of publications from the same authors (see Lingard, 2004; Lingard, 2008; Lingard, Brown, Bradley, Bailey, & Townsend, 2007; Lingard & Francis, 2004b, 2005, 2007, 2009; Lingard & Sublet, 2002; Lingard, Townsend, Bradley, & Brown, 2008).

Department of Labour’s national work-life balance survey (Department of Labour, 2006) findings indicate just over half of the employees experienced work-life balance but a significant number of employees experience work-life conflict and find it difficult to achieve work-life balance for a variety of reasons. A major source of conflict was that many people work long hours and unpaid additional hours. The survey shows that many New Zealanders would like more time away from work and flexible start and finish times (Department of Labour, 2006).

Similarly, the Thirty Families Project (2002), commissioned by the NZ Council of Trade Unions, found many New Zealanders work long hours averaging between 45 to 55 hours per week, many of which are not compensated for working overtime causing a sentiment of being undervalued in terms of pay and their lives outside of work. Regardless of compensation for working long hours, many felt they did not have control over hours worked nor adequate time to spend with family or in activities outside of work. Others reported being negatively affected by unpredictable and
unexpected working hours arising at the end of the day due to shift changes or weekend work.

Results from 2006 Census data showed different demographic groups tended to work long hours including construction subgroups (Department of Labour and Families Commission, 2008). This data showed 23% of the New Zealand workforce work very long hours i.e. 50 or more hours per week. Forty-five percent of heavy and civil engineering construction workers work long hours, while 30% of construction and mining labourers, 27% of construction services workers, and 25% of building construction workers work long hours (Department of Labour and Families Commission, 2008).

As stated previously, high pressure work is a major contributor to work-life conflict (Eby et al., 2005). In a study of young New Zealanders, work stress was shown to give rise to depression and anxiety and high work pressure, heavy workload, and rigid deadlines doubled this possibility (MacKenzie, 2008). The study found head chefs and construction workers held the most stressful jobs.

### 2.5 Work-Life Balance Initiatives

Societal changes such as work intensification, increases in women working, dual-earner and single parent families, men taking on more responsibilities at home, and an increase in elderly care demands due to an ageing population (Drucker, 2001; Patrickson and Hartmann, 1998 as cited in De Cieri et al., 2005) coupled with fewer non-working hours means employees across the board need and expect more support from organisations (Kossek et al., 2010). “More individuals want to work in different ways across generations, lifestyle, and family configurations” (Kossek et al., 2010, p. 8). In response, employers have begun implementing work-life balance initiatives.

Work-life balance initiatives are benefits offered by companies aimed at helping improve work-life balance. Work-life balance initiatives may also be referred to as work-life benefits (De Bruin & Dupuis, 2004), work-life policies, strategies, programmes, and practices (De Cieri et al., 2005). All work-life balance initiatives “ideally are based on rationales of jointly benefiting the well-being and effectiveness of employers, and employees on and off the job, including their families” (Kossek et al., 2010, p. 4).
2.5.1 Categories

Work-life balance initiatives can be broken down into subsets. Frone (2003 as cited in Smith & Gardner, 2007) divides work-life balance into four categories: flexible work arrangements, leave arrangements, dependent care assistance, and general services. Similarly, Lingard and Francis’ (2005) principal component analysis breaks down the topic into four factors: childcare support, alternative work arrangements, crisis assistance/support, and wellness and personal development. Furthermore, Kossek (2010) divides work-life balance initiatives into two areas, structural and cultural work-life support, both of which must be integrated to achieve effective outcomes. The subsets of initiatives described above which provide additional resources and allow for alternative work arrangements fall into the area of structural work-life support. The area of cultural work-life support as defined by Kossek (2010) focuses on informal relational issues such as organisational culture, supervisor and co-worker support. It is increasingly realised that the latter hugely influences employees’ perception and usage of the former (Allen, 2001; Kossek et al., 2010). Therefore, there is not only a need for work-life balance initiatives to be offered but for supervisors and managers within a company to be supportive of using such initiatives (Smith & Gardner, 2007). In order for this to happen, management and supervisors should not only be trained and encouraged to be supportive but also held accountable for and assessed on exhibiting such qualities (Kossek et al., 2010).

Most of the research on work-life balance initiatives focuses on alternative work arrangements with far less research on wellness, caregiving support, and crisis assistance (Kossek et al., 2010). This is not surprising as flexible work arrangements are reported as the most desired work-life balance initiative for New Zealanders (Department of Labour, 2006; Department of Labour Work-Life Balance Project, 2004; Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, 2003, 2005; McPherson & Reed, 2007). According to the New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development (2006), flexible work options include “career breaks, extended maternity and paternity leave, paid dependency leave, job share, subsidised health-care and leave for community, sports and volunteer work” (p. 3). The Department of Labour (2006) reported the alternative work arrangements most offered include: general domestic/special leave (91%), flexible working arrangements relating to hours (91%), study leave/sabbatical/career-break leave (84%), flexible working arrangements
relating to location (78%), ability to shift from full- to part-time while working the same position (73%), job sharing (61%), part-time work at senior levels (54%), compressed working week (42%), and term-time working (37%).

Halpern’s (2005) research links having more time-flexible working options with employee loyalty, fewer missed deadlines, and decreased stress and time off work. The 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce findings show flexible workplaces showed higher rates of employee job engagement, job satisfaction, intention to stay with the company, mental wellbeing, and lower rates of stress and negative spillover (Families and Work Institute, 2008b).

Thornthwaite’s (2004) research, which focused on the working time preferences of working parents (who make up half of the Australian workforce), indicated most working parents would prefer fewer working hours while flexible working time and part-time work are also desirable options. Part-time work arrangements were reported to be highly satisfactory for those using the option but on the other hand were perceived to limit career opportunities (McDonald, Guthrie, Bradley, & Shakespeare-Finch, 2005).

Contrary to expectations, Haar’s (2008) research identified that, although work-family conflict was negatively linked to job satisfaction and organisational commitment, employees using flexitime within a large NZ company that experience high work-life conflict have lower job satisfaction and organisational commitment than those not using flexitime. On the other hand, employees who do not use flexitime currently but intend to in the future experience increased job satisfaction. Hayman (2009) found perceived usability of work-life balance initiatives was associated with improved work-life balance.

According to EEO Trust surveys, flexible work hours and location are the work-life balance initiatives most offered, followed by work and life information while child/eldercare were offered significantly less in New Zealand (McPherson & Reed, 2007). De Cieri et al. show the most prevalent work-life balance initiatives offered in Australian organisations are part-time options, study leave, flexitime, occasionally working from home, and job sharing (De Cieri et al., 2005). The U.S. 2008 National Study of Employers showed 79% of employers offer some sort of flexible working hours and the provision of elder care information, employee assistance programmes
(EAPs), wellness programmes, and breast-feeding facilities is increasing (Families and Work Institute, 2008a).

An EEO Trust survey (2005) of NZ parents indicates parents consider the most helpful work-life benefits to be flexible working hours, high quality part-time work, supportive workplace culture, and suitable childcare.

An in depth qualitative study of employees from large New Zealand businesses showed strong interest in counselling and compressed workweeks but thought they were unlikely to be offered by their company (UMR Research Limited, 2003).

Findings from a 2008 survey on work-life balance issues of 234 members of the Equal Employment Opportunities Employers Group in New Zealand show an increase in the uptake and awareness of work-life balance initiatives overall since the previous 2006 survey (Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, 2008).

2.5.2 Positive Effects

Brough et al. (2005) reports work-life balance initiatives “appear to improve psychological outcomes over time within both work and non-work domains” (p. 232). Furthermore, a review of research on work-life balance initiatives found a substantial amount of research which linked such initiatives to “reduced levels of employee turnover, increased employee satisfaction, commitment and productivity, and decreased rates of physical and emotional disorders associated with work–life conflict” (Brough et al., 2008, p. 267). It should be noted that Haar et al.’s (2005) findings show attitudes do not differ between employees who do and do not use work-life balance initiatives indicating there is not a ‘backlash’ from non-users in organisations who provide such initiatives.

It is argued that implementing work-life balance policies which accommodate a diverse range of employees leads to having higher quality employees which in turn increase firm performance and competitive advantage (Kossek et al., 2010). It is also argued that work-life balance policies attract and maintain employees (Casper & Buffardi, 2004; Eby et al., 2005) which leads to cost savings through decreased turnover and that if work-life balance initiatives contribute to reduced stress, reduced work-life conflict, and increased well-being, the whole organisation will experience improved performance (Kossek et al., 2010).
2.5.3 Negative Effects

Despite much research, the best ways for organisations to provide helpful solutions to improve work-life balance are not fully understood. Furthermore, there is contention about whether the initiatives that employers use are linked to improved work-life balance. There is plenty of literature that link positive outcomes to various work-life balance initiatives, but some research unexpectedly shows apparent negative outcomes from work-life balance policies. Brough et al. (2005) found a correlation between work-life balance initiative usage and family-to-work conflict.

It has recently been argued that the implementation and use of work-life balance policies may also prove to reinforce the idea of the ideal worker (the worker that ranks the importance of work above all other responsibilities). In order to avoid this, it is argued that when work-life balance policies are implemented, they must be mainstreamed; that is, accepted and promoted as core workplace practices (Kossek et al., 2010).

There is some debate about the effects of work-life balance policies on organisations. Some research shows increased productivity but no increase in profitability for firms who implement work-life balance policies while other research shows no increase in productivity (Brough et al., 2008).

Part-time employment, although perceived as being a positive work-life balance initiative, can reinforce gender inequalities, decrease career options, security and income (Brough et al., 2008).

2.5.4 Utilization gap

What employees prefer and what employees actually do once the options are available can be different and evidence of a gap between the organisational provision of work-life balance initiatives and actual employee usage of the initiatives has recently emerged (Brough et al., 2008; De Cieri et al., 2005). It is suggested that utilisation is dependent on not only availability but other issues such as organisational support. The difference in uptake is possibly due to the perceived supportiveness of the workplace culture for using such policies (Dallimore & Mickel, 2006; De Cieri et al., 2005).
2.5.5 Barriers to uptake

The largest perceived barriers to implementation of work-life balance initiatives in NZ are “needing everyone in the workplace at the same time” and being “too complicated” (Department of Labour, 2006, p. 36). In a study carried out for the Department of Labour, UMR Research Limited (2003) reported the barriers in implementing work-life balance initiatives as identified by employers were: perceived cost; time and effort required to manage initiatives; and general lack of knowledge about the subject.

De Cieri et al.’s (2005) review of the extant literature identified multiple barriers to the development, implementation, and effectiveness of work-life balance initiatives including: an organisational culture that supports long working hours and high commitment, lack of support for employees’ non-work commitments, supervisor and middle management opposition, senior management preference for hiring employees with similar attributes to themselves, and lack of communication and awareness about work-life balance initiatives. A review of three Australian surveys showed organisational inaction, which includes “lack of communication, support, involvement of senior and line management, and education”, was the strongest barrier to implementation of work-life balance policies (De Cieri et al., 2005, p. 98). Overall, De Cieri et al.’s (2005) research findings suggest “that a negative culture, working environment and attitudes of supervisors create barriers to the implementation of work-life balance” (p. 98).

People often do not use policies because they feel that usage may have a negative effect on their career path, therefore it is key that management communicate and make clear their objectives and expectations (Thorntwhaite, 2004). Employee “awareness of the availability of work-life balance initiatives was strongly associated with initiative use” (Smith & Gardner, 2007, p. 7). De Cieri (2005) found that the more initiatives that are offered, the more likely they are to be used.

2.5.6 Organisations

The results from a survey of 7 members of the Business Council employees and employers representing a range of business types and sizes offering work-life balance initiatives showed that: policies were able to be implemented over a diverse range of businesses; organisational culture was important for their success; and communication
from managers was important for employee awareness and use of the initiatives (New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development, 2006). From the organisations’ perspectives, the policies had to be economically sustainable and were important for maintaining dedicated employees. Their findings reinforce those of several other work-life balance studies (Yasbek, 2004) which show there is no one-size-fits-all policy that works across all business; hence, for best practice the Business Council recommended providing education and information on various work-life balance programmes as opposed to government regulation (New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development, 2006).

Smith and Gardner’s (2007) research within a large NZ organisation show managerial and supervisor support affect work-life balance initiative usage. Managerial support was linked to lower work-life conflict, intention to turnover, perceived negative career implications, and higher commitment, but contrary to other research, co-worker support was not linked to work-life balance initiative usage (Smith & Gardner, 2007). Forsyth and Polzer-Debruyne (2007) found employee perception of organisational support for an individual’s work-life balance was related to increased job satisfaction and reduced work pressure, both of which reduce leaving intention. Contrary to Rhode and Eisenberger’s (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) meta-analysis finding work-life balance initiatives improve performance, Forsyth and Polzer-Debruyne (2007) found reduced job performance in relation to perceived organisational support for work-life balance.

In a NZ study, Haar and Spell’s (2004) findings show that increased employee knowledge and understanding of work-life balance initiatives is linked to a “stronger emotional bond with the organisation”, therefore suggesting it is beneficial for an organisation to clearly communicate its work-life balance policies so that all employees are aware of what they are and how they are expected to use them (p. 1050).

It is argued that organisations must be aware of work-life balance issues and provide adequate work-life balance policies in order to attract and maintain desirable employees, especially in competitive labour markets (De Cieri et al., 2005).

Work-life balance initiatives can be costly to implement and as research shows there is no one-size-fits-all programme to fit all employers and employees (Yasbek, 2004).
A review of international and New Zealand literature (Yasbek, 2004) provides evidence of benefits for businesses that have work-life balance programmes, however these depend on individual businesses’ circumstances. Research shows that organisations offer different initiatives to reflect the particular needs of employees (Bardoel et al., 1999).

In order to offer the most suitable work-life balance initiatives, organisations should understand the demographics and needs of its employees (Bardoel et al., 1999). The Equal Employment Opportunities Trust (2008) work life survey indicates surveys of employees are over twice as likely to measure employee satisfaction with and use of work-life balance initiatives as they are to measure employee need for work-life benefits.

2.6 Work-life balance in construction

The construction industry can be a particularly challenging industry in which to work. Jobs can be highly stressful considering such pressures as achieving tight programme deadlines, meeting the needs of multiple stakeholders, dealing with disputes, and maintaining the safety of all individuals onsite (Lingard & Francis, 2004a). Furthermore, “the construction industry is a demanding work environment in which a culture of long work hours prevails. Most construction sites operate on a six-day week, and professionals and managers work many hours of unpaid overtime” (Lingard & Francis, 2004a, p. 3). Considering many of these job characteristics have been linked to work-life conflict, the construction industry would likely benefit from the implementation of work-life balance initiatives. Bardoel et al.’s (2008) review of research shows research exists on work-life balance in the New Zealand and Australia construction industry, but research regarding which types of initiatives employees prefer appears to be lacking. A number of the studies carried out regarding work-life balance in the construction industry focus on working hours perhaps due to the long hours employees within the industry typically work. Work-life balance research focusing on the construction industry is reviewed here.

Exploratory research using focus groups to understand the supports and barriers to work-life balance in the construction industry found that workplace culture, project resourcing, and schedule demands were identified barriers to achieving work-life balance and collaborative project alliance contracts, flexible working hours, and
project management support were identified as supports (Turner, Lingard, & Francis, 2009).

A qualitative research analysis based on two case studies carried out in Australia found that employees think work-life balance problems do exist in the construction industry (Townsend et al., 2006a). These employees suggested reform should happen in the following areas: government and/or organisation regulation of working hours; formal work-life balance policies and informal support by supervisors; and employee control over working time. Employees in this study reported “substantial levels of peer pressure within the industry in relation to working hours [and] pressure to be at work on Saturdays, even if there’s nothing to do except read the paper” (Townsend et al., 2006a, p. 14). Some employees pointed out that it would be difficult for companies to win tenders on a five day work week and that legislation may be the only way to realise change while others believed a five day work week should in fact be directed by the organisation or client. Conclusions draw in this study were “that employee voice presents as an important resource for managers and policy-makers in determining work-life balance policies for industry, workplaces and individual employees” (Townsend et al., 2006a, p. 2).

Similarly, another study identifies the traditional nature of competitive tendering for construction projects as a major barrier to employees being able to achieve work-life balance and suggests collaborative project alliances improve the prospect of employers being able to provide a working environment that supports employee work-life balance (Lingard, Brown, et al., 2007). One employee highlights this point with the following statement: “unless the client tells you that you will not work Saturdays and Sundays, then every contractor is going to allow in their price to work Saturdays [in order to] be more competitive” (Lingard, Brown, et al., 2007, p. 813).

The results from case studies of four Australian civil engineering construction project alliances that implemented alternative work schedules (two sites following a compressed work week, one site with compulsory reduced working hours, and one site with optional reduced working hours) showed an overall employee preference to not work Saturdays (Lingard et al., 2008). Although the results showed employees overall benefited from reducing the number of days worked, preferences for working hours varied among two discrete groups of workers, salaried workers and waged
workers, which suggest that the effect on take-home pay is an important factor in employee preference for work-life benefits. Skilled and unskilled labourers are typically paid through hourly wages plus a penalty rate for working overtime while those who manage and supervise waged workers typically earn a salary with no additional remuneration for working overtime (Townsend, Bradley, Brown, & Lingard, 2008). Hence, a dichotomy is created whereby employee preferences are driven by pay structure which makes it particularly difficult to accommodate all involved if restructuring working hours is attempted (Townsend et al., 2008). The following quote highlights this dichotomy:

I feel that the hours/days worked by those on site is excessive. It causes division between staff and day labour, as staff do not get paid for all hours worked and day labour work too long [in order to] get more money, which in many cases is not well managed. (Lingard & Francis, 2004b)

Another study focused on a project alliance which attempted to reduce the number of working days from five to six days a week without increasing the hours worked during the weekdays which meant the employees were working reduced hours overall (Townsend et al., 2006b). Interestingly, when another construction site opened in the vicinity, one-third of the labour force left to work for the new construction site who offered a six day work week. This further highlights the importance to waged workers of the monetary incentive to work Saturdays where they can earn time and a half pay. Although waged workers acknowledged improved work-life balance from not working Saturdays, in order to maintain their level of pay most stated they would prefer a compressed work week where they are still able to earn overtime and have two days off. This particular project reverted back to working six days per week because of the loss of staff, and instead created a roster system for the salaried workers to work one out of four Saturdays.

A post-hoc study of a compressed working week, i.e. working the same amount of hours per week in five days instead of six (a contractual condition dictated by the construction project alliance) revealed that a compressed work week was strongly supported by both waged and salaried workers (Lingard, Brown, et al., 2007). Employees reported the following benefits which contributed to improved work-life
balance: “increased physical and psychological well-being, greater motivation, improved productivity, increased job commitment, and increased involvement in home/family activities” (Lingard, Brown, et al., 2007, p. 814). The research suggests collaborative project alliances provide a good environment in which pioneering work-life balance initiatives can be put into practice. One managerial employee described project alliances as:

conducive to being able to [implement a compressed work week]
because we can make more money by being smarter and changing the designs and being efficient, whereas the ‘old school’ way of making money in construction is going faster and harder and longer - squeezing as much as you can out of resources over a finite period of time (Lingard, Brown, et al., 2007, pp. 812-813).

Significantly, the compressed work week did not hinder meeting programme or cost targets which suggests improved work-life balance can improve the overall outcome and performance on a project.

Another study analysed the effects of a ‘long break’ i.e. employees having two days instead of one day off per week (Brown, Ling, Bradley, Lingard, & Townsend, 2009). Reported effects of not having a long break included “fatigue, tiredness and family breakdown” (Brown et al., 2009, p. 10). After the implementation of a ‘long break’ and the compressed work week employees reported improvements in work-life balance due to “spending time away from home on short holidays, feeling refreshed, spending time with family and more time on hobbies and leisure activities” (Brown et al., 2009, p. 10).

An exploratory study aimed to reveal the adaptive strategies used by couples where one partner was a professional in the Australian construction industry (Lingard, 2008). Quantitative data was obtained through an internet based survey followed by semi-structured telephone interviews with selected participants. The results showed that typical work arrangements in the construction industry pose problems for dual earner couples, and the most typical adaptive strategies involve the female partner reducing the amount of hours she works. The researchers conclude that “failure to provide regular (and reasonable) hours of employment... is likely to perpetuate the long standing under-representation of women in the construction industry and
discourage the entry of younger male employees who desire a more “hands-on” experience of parenting” (Lingard, 2008, p. 575). The results indicate a ‘structural lag’ whereby working arrangements are not keeping up with societal changes.

A survey of a large Australian construction firm found site-based male employees worked longer hours than those in head or regional offices and experienced higher levels of work interference with personal life, higher levels of exhaustion, and lower satisfaction with pay (Lingard & Francis, 2004b). On average, site-based employees involved in direct construction worked 63 hours per week and 23% of these employees would prefer reduced working hours and more time off. Employees based mainly in a site office worked 56 hours per week on average of which 52% would prefer reduced working hours and more time off. Finally, employees based in the head or regional office worked an average of 49 hours per week and only 9% of these employees would like reduced working hours and more time off. Qualitative comments from the end of the questionnaire revealed site-based employees expressed the most concern about working weekends.

Considering work in relation to relationships and family, a study of employees in professional and managerial roles revealed negative interference from work to family life confirming “the importance of organisational practices for employees’ family functioning” (Lingard & Francis, 2007, p. 90). Survey results of Australian civil engineers show the most significant factor straining relationships was long working hours (Lingard & Sublet, 2002).

Regarding the influence of a supportive workplace on work-life balance, results from the same survey indicated employees did not perceive their workplace to be supportive of the need to balance work with life outside of work (Francis, 2004). It is purported that work-life balance policies are virtually ineffective if the organisational culture does not strongly value such initiatives and “in order to achieve a supportive culture, change must be driven from the top down and sensitivity training for middle managers and supervisors may also be required” (Francis, 2004, p. 7). The research showed strong correlations between “supportive organisational values and lower intention to quit; higher levels of organisational commitment, job, and life satisfaction; and lower levels of mental health issues” (Francis, 2004, p. 7).
Research funded by the Building Industry Consultative Council in Victoria, a group that advises clients, employers, trade unions, and government, was carried out to help formulate a strategic framework for wellbeing policies and practices within the construction industry (MacKenzie, 2008). With a focus on the topic of wellbeing in commercial construction, results overwhelmingly suggested that:

although people in the industry find construction work satisfying, they are collectively weary and generally sad about the personal cost they endure as a consequence of their work. On the whole, working hours that are out of sync with family life, and ongoing pressure that has a detrimental impact on physical and mental wellbeing, are taking a serious toll on people in the industry. From all accounts, unrealistic programming appears to be the root cause of work/life conflict in the Victorian commercial construction industry. The flow-on pressure this causes impacts all aspects of project construction and people at all levels of the industry, to varying degrees. The cultural features of long hours, weekend work, confrontational work environments, and inadequate human resource management skills, resourcing pressure and liquidated damages are having a negative impact on the wellbeing of individuals, companies and the industry. (MacKenzie, 2008, p. 53)

An empirical investigation was completed via electronic survey of the employees of two large public and private construction companies in Australia regarding their preferences for work-life benefits. Mean scores for types of work-life balance initiative were highest for wellness and personal development, moderate for both alternative work arrangements and crisis assistance/support, and lowest for childcare support. Preferences significantly differed according to family structure and age. The findings here reinforce other work-life balance studies which show that there is no one-size-fits-all policy that will suit all employees. This article suggests further research replicate the study in other countries (Lingard & Francis, 2005).
2.7 Summary

The topic of work-life balance is wide-ranging. The argument for adequate work-life balance has been increasingly important for New Zealanders in the past decade. Work-life balance initiatives are implemented by employers to help improve work-life balance but there is no one-size-fits-all programme applicable to all businesses and employees. Extensive research on work-life balance in the construction industry in New Zealand does not exist. Judging from Australian research, there is a significant amount of work-life imbalance in the construction industry. The researcher would like to further the research as suggested by Lingard and Francis (2005) so that the needs of employees in the New Zealand construction industry are better understood. This research will address the question: What are employees’ preferences for work-life balance initiatives in a large construction company in New Zealand? In addition, since much of the work-life balance research in the construction industry focuses on working hours and suggests long working hours without long breaks adversely affects the ability to achieve work-life balance, a sub-research topic will address the question: What working hours do employees carry out in a large New Zealand construction company? The following chapter will explain the methodology used to answer these questions.
3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

A review of the research methodology used in order to answer the research questions is presented in chapter 3. The previous research on which this study is based is described followed by an explanation of the type of research and data collection used and why. The issues surrounding reliability, validity, and research ethics are then addressed followed by a description of the questionnaire instrument and the electronic survey software. Finally the methods of data collection and analysis are explained.

3.2 Research design

The research question developed in response to the literature, specifically Lingard and Francis’ (2005) study, is: ‘What are employees’ preferences for work-life balance initiatives in a large construction company within New Zealand?’ In addition, the sub-research question developed in response to the wider body of research in the construction industry is: ‘What working hours do employees carry out in a large New Zealand construction company?’ The objectives of this research are to rank and compare preferences for work-life balance initiatives of employees within a large New Zealand construction company and compare these results with results of a similar study undertaken within two large Australian construction companies. Therefore, the design of the current study is based on Lingard and Francis’ (2005) research project (refer Appendix E) and will be carried out in a similar manner in order to ensure the data is comparable. The secondary objectives of the research are to use the demographic information gathered to define typical working hours.

3.2.1 Lingard and Francis’ (2005) research

Lingard and Francis (2005) collected their data from employees of a large private civil engineering and building construction company and a public organisation
involved in large infrastructure construction. All professional and managerial employees involved with construction projects within the two companies were asked to complete an internet-based survey. The survey also had a printable pdf option. The website gave details regarding the purpose of the study and how anonymity was ensured. A letter from upper management preceded the survey encouraging employees to participate, explaining its purpose and ensuring confidentiality.

In the first part of the survey, demographic information was collected. The second part of the survey used a 21-item composite scale to measure employees’ preferences for work-life balance initiatives. The survey requested respondents rate the usefulness of different work-life balance initiatives by using a five-point Likert scale (1=not at all useful, 2=of limited use, 3=moderately useful, 4=useful, 5=very useful). They were asked to disregard any possibility of future use or implementation and simply rate how useful they considered each initiative to be for them personally.

Principal Components Analysis with varimax rotation was used to analyse the composite scale scores. Items from the composite scale were grouped into factors. Then, by carrying out one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs), mean scores for each factor were used to compare employees’ preferences for types of work-life balance initiative according to gender, age, and family structure.

3.3 Current research

As stated, the design of this research is based on that of Lingard and Francis’ (2005) study to ensure the data is comparable. Nevertheless, an explanation of the type of research and the reason certain research methods are used is explained here.

3.3.1 Type of research

The research undertaken here can be described as social research as it examines an aspect of human society (Denscombe, 2003). This research is categorised as applied as opposed to pure research as it is research within a particular industry and the information, for example, can be applied to development of work-life balance programmes or used to compare the industry with other industries. It is not pure
because it does not aim to discover new theories or laws of nature (Fellows & Liu, 2003). The current research project is both exploratory and confirmatory. It is confirmatory in that the research has been carried out in another country and is replicated in New Zealand with the intention of comparing the data to examine likeness. The research is exploratory in that no research regarding the preferences of employees for a variety of work-life balance initiatives appears to exist in the New Zealand construction industry.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection are employed for the current research. Quantitative research tends to be objective, measured with numbers, and statistically analysed. One feature of quantitative research techniques is that the data collection and data analysis are rather distinct (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 1991). Qualitative research is subjective and often descriptive (Naoum, 1998). “An explication of ‘meaning’, rather than the isolation of ‘truth’, is identified as the goal” (Burns, 1997, p. 294). The method of using a Likert scale questionnaire can be defined as a quantitative technique because the data provided is ordinal and statistical analysis can be easily carried out (Denscombe, 2003; Easterby-Smith et al., 1991). Nevertheless the research method will elicit attitudinal, qualitative information from respondents due to the fact that the answers to the questions are subjective and based on preference. In order to gain deeper, richer understanding of the data collected using closed questions in the Likert scale questionnaire instrument, two open questions will be added to the end of the questionnaire to allow the respondent to further express any opinions on the topic and suggest additional useful work-life balance initiatives. The addition of these questions will not compromise the ability to compare this study with Lingard and Francis’(2005) research as it is a separate component and lies at the end of the questionnaire. As the open questions purely elicit an opinion on the topic in a written, descriptive form, both the data and analysis technique is qualitative. It would be difficult to carry out any type of statistical analysis with this data; rather the comments will be coded and tabulated and used in the discussion to further explain the quantitative results. With qualitative analysis, “the researcher’s identity, values and beliefs cannot be entirely eliminated from the process”, and as such this is
recognised as being part of qualitative research (Denscombe, 2003, p. 268). The use of both qualitative and quantitative techniques to analyse the data from multiple perspectives which can reduce the shortcomings of each and provide a multi-dimensional representation of the research topic is termed triangulation (Fellows & Liu, 2003).

3.3.2 Type of data collection

A variety of strategies to carry out social research exist including survey, case study, experiment, action research, and ethnography (Denscombe, 2003). The survey approach tends to produce data which is comprehensive and empirical and provides a snapshot of the research topic at a specific point in time (Denscombe, 2003). A cross-sectional survey can easily portray “features of large numbers of people or organisations”, but causality cannot be established nor external factors causing a correlation eliminated (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991, p. 35). The aim of this study is to elicit a cross-section of wide-ranging, empirical data from a large number of respondents hence the use of the survey method. Other methods would be inappropriate due to restraints of time, resources, and logistics.

The descriptive survey and the analytical survey are two different types of survey. The descriptive survey “deals with counting the number of respondents with certain opinions/attitudes towards a specific subject” (Naoum, 1998, p. 44). The analytical survey “aims to establish relationship and association between the attributes/objects of your questionnaire” (Naoum, 1998, p. 45). The current study is descriptive in that it ranks preferences and ascertains average working hours, but it is also analytical in that it establishes relationships between the type of respondent (independent variable) and the preference for work-life balance initiatives (dependent variable) (Naoum, 1998).

Surveys can be implemented in the form of a questionnaire (postal or internet based), face-to-face interview, or telephone interview (Denscombe, 2003). Face-to-face interviews are costly considering time and travel compared to the other types of survey (Denscombe, 2003). The researcher is directly involved with the respondent
in face-to-face and telephone interviews where voice inflection and word emphasis can influence the responses given, whereas using a postal or internet-based questionnaire the researcher is completely removed allowing for greater standardisation of responses and higher reliability (Burns, 1997; Denscombe, 2003).

Questionnaires are most appropriately used when:

- a large number of respondents exist in different geographical areas
- data gathered is straightforward, concise and uncontroversial
- the social climate allows for honest answers
- the data needs to be standardised for each question and remain uninfluenced by interaction with the researcher
- sufficient time exists for production and response
- it is reasonably expected that all respondents are able to access, read, and understand the survey (Denscombe, 2003)

The aim of this research is to rank and compare a large number of respondents’ preferences. This type of research clearly lends itself to either a postal or internet questionnaire. Since all managerial and professional employees involved with projects at the construction company being surveyed have work email accounts and computer access it is deemed appropriate to use a web-based questionnaire with printable pdf option in this instance.

Limitations of the questionnaire (postal or internet) include: the questions must be simple; they are inflexible i.e. the researcher has no ability to explain or clarify; respondents may not answer honestly; the researcher cannot be sure the respondent is who they say they are; and student questionnaires can be seen as low priority (Naoum, 1998). As the questions about preference are straight-forward and easy to understand, the fact that questions should be kept simple should not be a limitation. The researcher acknowledges there is no guarantee respondents will answer honestly or are who they say they are, but with clear assurance of anonymity relative honesty is assumed. Although student questionnaire can be thought of as low priority, the
endorsement from the General Manager of the company may increase the priority respondents place on the survey.

Advantages of using a web-based questionnaire include a faster reply and turnaround time, low cost, standardisation of data, data accuracy from automated data entry, warnings for respondents of incomplete questions, access to populations, convenience and low demand on respondents (Denscombe, 2003).

Two major disadvantages of the electronic questionnaire are sample bias if possible respondents do not have email access and being easily ignored hence often presenting low response rates (Denscombe, 2003). Although a possible limitation of this method is that employees who spend more time on their computer may be more likely to complete the survey which could potentially produce biased data, the researcher feels neither one of these disadvantages threaten the validity of the study. Once again, by having the General Manager of the company endorse the survey by sending out an initial email requesting employees participate in the study and assuring anonymity, respondents may be less likely to ignore the questionnaire. Lingard and Francis’ (2005) response rate within the private construction company totalled 63, a high response rate of approximately 60%. The number of potential respondents for this study is approximately 200 with a hopeful response rate of at least 50%.

Open questions allow the respondent to give an in depth response in their own words which can be difficult to analyse while closed questions elicit precise answers that are easily used in statistical analysis (Fellows & Liu, 2003). Open questions have been added to the questionnaire instrument in order to allow the respondents to suggest additional work-life balance initiatives and further explain any issues or points they would like to make regarding the topic. With the addition of the open questions the perspective of the respondent can be better understood and richer meaning gained. The use of both types of questions in the questionnaire instrument allows the researcher to gain both broad answers which allow statistical analysis and in depth answers which enable a more meaningful analysis of the statistical results. A disadvantage of closed questions is that it may force the respondent to answer a
question when they do not feel the appropriate answer exists (Naoum, 1998). However this is not a problem as answering questions is not mandatory and the Likert scale used ranges from ‘not at all useful’ to ‘very useful’. If a work-life balance initiative is not applicable to the respondent, the answer ‘not at all useful’ is an appropriate answer. The drawback of open questions is that they can be difficult to analyse (Naoum, 1998). As only two open questions exist, it is feasible to code and tabulate the answers to assist analysis.

Typically a postal or internet questionnaire instrument should:

- include a cover letter explaining the research
- have clear instructions
- group similar questions together
- situate the factual questions before those based on opinion

The questionnaire designed for this research does all of the above. The questionnaire order should begin with warm-up questions or demographic questions and leave possible threatening or dull questions towards the end so the questionnaire is more likely to be completed (Burns, 1997).

Sampling is the process of collecting data from only part of the population with which the research is concerned. The population for consideration in the current study are project related managerial and professional employees who work within large commercial construction companies in New Zealand. Administration and accounting staff that are not directly involved with a construction project will not be included because such staff typically work similar hours and have similar working conditions to those based in other industries. This study aims to focus on staff specific to the construction industry similar to the sample in Lingard and Francis’ (2005) research. Due to constraints regarding accessibility and permission plus the aim to carry out a study similar to Lingard and Francis (2005), the sample used for this research was an opportunity sample of employees within one large New Zealand construction company. The researcher had access and permission to use the company therefore making it a practical choice. It must be recognised that because
the sample is an opportunity sample from one construction company, generalisations may not be valid. The generalisability of the findings to other large New Zealand construction companies depends on the how similar the companies are. Significant similarities amongst New Zealand’s large construction companies exist including their size, capability of delivering large commercial projects, and similar working hours, benefits and remuneration. Although the large construction companies operating in the Auckland region all have similarities, it must be noted that some factors are likely to differ throughout these companies such as company policy and culture.

Lingard and Francis (2004a, p. 21) explain the limitations of using a single company for data collection:

> Limiting a survey to a single private and public organisation can pose problems for the generalisability of its findings. However, there are also advantages in that context variables such as organisational culture, policies and procedures are controlled. In the light of the scope and purpose of this study, data collection from one organisation was deemed to be adequate.

Similarly for this research project, collecting data from one company is appropriate.

### 3.3.3 Reliability and validity

“Reliability [is] concerned with giving the same result consistently under the same conditions, while validity [is] concerned with an assessment or judgement measuring what it is supposed to measure” (Burns, 1997, p. 293). Typically a pilot study of the questionnaire would be implemented to improve reliability and validity. As Lingard and Francis (2005) undertook this process with the questionnaire instrument, it is unnecessary to do a pilot study in this instance as the survey has proven effective. In place of a pilot study for the open-ended question, the researcher has undertaken an acceptable alternative of discussing the question setup with a supervisor (Fellows & Liu, 2003). High reliability can be achieved by using a consistent approach (Reliability and validity in research, n.d.). Administration of the same internet-based
questionnaire instrument to all respondents at the same time can improve reliability. When research is well designed to measure what the researcher is attempting to measure, it possesses internal validity. As described above the questionnaire instrument used is a valid method of collecting a cross-section of wide-ranging, empirical data from a large number of respondents. The fact that this research is designed in a similar manner to previously published research (Lingard & Francis, 2005) further validates the research approach. As the research question aims to rank and compare employees’ preferences for work-life balance benefits in a large New Zealand construction company, and the sub-research question aims to analyse working hours in a large New Zealand construction company, it is unnecessary for the results to be have external validity.

3.3.4 Research Ethics

Research ethics were considered when designing and implementing the research. “Researcher participants must not be subjected to unnecessary risk of harm as a result of their participation” (Research ethics: Core principles, n.d., p. 1). Respondents were able to control when and if they participated in the research. The questionnaire could be completed at anytime throughout the period it was run and could be completed at any location either through a work or home computer or by printing out the pdf version. Anonymity was guaranteed. Through accessing the link to the survey or completing the pdf version, the respondent’s identity was neither requested nor able to be traced. The potential respondents were informed the data would be stored in a secure place at Unitec for up to 5 years. None of the questions were mandatory to answer aside from the consent agreement. Informed consent was also addressed. The reason for participants being asked to complete the questionnaire was clearly explained. The questions were deemed to be clear and simple to understand. Considering vulnerability, the potential respondent should not be pressured to participate and implied coercion should be avoided. The General Manager of the company sent an email endorsing the voluntary survey so that employees understood that it was acceptable but not mandatory to participate. The danger here was that employees may have felt pressured to fill out the survey due to
implied coercion. Alternatively, if the survey was sent out without endorsement from the company, the researcher risked employees not participating because they may have thought it was unimportant or not supported by the company. Since anonymity was ensured and employees could not be identified should they choose not to participate, implied coercion was hopefully avoided. Considering other ethical responsibilities, data was only used for the purposes of the research and all data was represented accurately in the analysis.

3.3.5 The questionnaire

The questionnaire as shown in Appendix A was divided into two main sections. A request for participation, brief instructions, and an explanation of the research was provided in an email to all potential respondents (see Appendix B). The main section of the questionnaire was preceded by an informed consent clause whereby agreement was a mandatory prerequisite for completing the survey. The first section was made up of closed questions which requested demographic information. No questions were mandatory; that is, there were no forced responses. Section 2 comprised twenty closed questions where respondents were asked to rate their preference for a variety of work-life balance initiatives using a 5 point Likert scale where 1=not at all useful, 2=of limited use, 3=moderately useful, 4=useful, 5=very useful. Two open questions where employees could provide additional feedback and suggest additional initiatives were included at the end.

A few questions were slightly modified from Lingard and Francis’ (2005) questionnaire to avoid the need for additional ethics approvals. Two initiatives regarding part time work options from Lingard and Francis’ (2005) questionnaire (‘offering extended part time work options for return to work after the birth or adoption of a child’ and ‘offering permanent part time work options’) were combined into one question in the current survey (‘offering part time work options’). As both of these initiatives in Lingard and Francis’ (2005) research were categorised into one factor (alternative work arrangements), combining these two initiatives into one should not affect the factors or the ability to do a comparison between the two studies. Similarly, the initiative ‘offering extended parental leave after the birth or
adoption of a child’ was shortened to ‘offering extended parental leave’ in order to remove information that may have been deemed too personal. The shortening of the initiative wording was not deemed to change the meaning of the initiative; hence no skewed effects were expected. For similar reasons, all of the demographic questions from Lingard and Francis’ (2005) study were not used. To avoid asking respondents to reveal information that was too personal, respondents were not asked to reveal family status and birthplace.

3.3.6 SurveyMonkey

The web-based questionnaire was administered using web-based software called SurveyMonkey. It is an online survey software tool which offers many features which aid survey creation, data collection, reporting, and analysis (SurveyMonkey, 2010). A survey link in an email took the respondent directly to the questionnaire. Alternatively a pdf which was able to be filled out electronically or printed out was attached to the email hence accessing the website was not mandatory. A variety of question types and survey templates were available through SurveyMonkey as well as the option to create custom charts, cross-tabs, and filters. Compliance with US Section 508 certification guidelines ensured the data collection and surveys were always safe and accessible. Results were able to be exported to Excel for further analysis.

3.3.7 Data collection

Unitec does not typically allow the undergraduate students to undertake postal surveys but for the purposes of this research an internet-based survey administered to employees within one construction company has been approved.

An email list of the professional and managerial staff in the Auckland region was retrieved from the company. A few days before the questionnaire was sent, the General Manager of the company emailed the employees endorsing the survey (Refer Appendix C). The employees were emailed with a link to the questionnaire instrument and a pdf attachment of the questionnaire. The email included a
description of and reason for the survey (See Appendix B). As the sub-research question was developed after the questionnaire was implemented, the sub-research question was not described in the email. The first page of the survey contained a consent clause to which the respondent was required to agree before carrying out the survey (See Appendix A). The questionnaire was open for completion for 6 working days, and an email reminder of the last day to complete the survey was sent the day before the survey closed (Refer Appendix D).

3.3.8 Data analysis

The demographic characteristics of the sample from the section 1 data were tabulated to show the response count and percentage for each demographic category. In addition, the data from question 7 regarding working hours were tabulated to show response count and percentage of employees according to working hours depending on job role and job location. These results were also represented graphically to enable quick understanding of the data.

Analysis of section 2 data consisted of calculating mean rating scores and establishing standard deviations for each work-life balance initiative. Employees’ perception of the utility of various work-life balance initiatives were analysed by determining the mean rating score for each initiative and ranking the initiatives based on mean rating score. The standard deviation measures how much values vary from the average value. Standard deviations were calculated using the following formula where $x$ is the sample mean average and $n$ is the sample size.

$$\sqrt{\frac{\sum (x - \bar{x})^2}{(n-1)}}$$ (Excel, 2007)

Mean rating scores were also calculated for the four different categories of initiative based on the factors established by Lingard and Francis (2005) – ‘childcare support’, ‘alternative work arrangements’, ‘crisis assistance/support’, and ‘wellness and personal development’. The ranking of the four factors was then compared with Lingard and Francis’ (2005) results. Using SurveyMonkey’s filtering function, data
was filtered based on age, gender, and work location. The same approach was used to rank employee preference for the different factors according to the different demographic groupings. The responses to the open questions were coded based on topic and tabulated and considered in the discussion to assist in drawing inferences regarding the results from section 2.

### 3.4 Summary

The current research project being based on a previous study easily lends itself to carrying out the study in a similar manner. The use of the survey method allowed the study to achieve its aim of collecting a cross-section of wide-ranging, empirical data from a large number of respondents in a relatively short amount of time. The electronic software SurveyMonkey enabled the production, collection, and analysis of a descriptive and analytical questionnaire so the data could be ranked and compared. The demographic and Likert scale questions allowed quantitative collection of attitudinal information enabling analysis of each work-life balance initiative, each category of initiative, and working hours. Keeping the questionnaire similar to that of Lingard and Francis’ (2005) allowed for a reasonable comparison between the two research projects. The addition of the qualitative open questions to the end of the questionnaire enabled the researcher to draw inferences about the quantitative data hence benefiting from the method of triangulation. The use of triangulation for breadth and depth of the topic and the survey method enabled the researcher to fully and adequately answer the research question ‘What are employees’ preferences for work-life balance initiatives in a large construction company within New Zealand?’ and the sub-research question ‘What working hours do employees carry out in a large New Zealand construction company?’ Chapter 4 will present the data obtained from the questionnaire in light of these research questions.
4 DATA

4.1 Introduction

The data gathered from the web-based electronic questionnaire with printable pdf option is presented in chapter 4. The survey findings are compiled and presented here in relation to the research question and sub-question.

4.2 Responses

An email invitation to partake in the survey was sent to all professional and managerial employees within a large construction company. Out of 174 possible respondents 124 questionnaires were filled out of which 121 were deemed usable (a 70 percent response rate). All respondents agreed to the consent clause contained in Question 1. In 3 of the questionnaires the 20 item question regarding preferences for work-life balance initiatives (Question # 9) was left blank. As this question was considered the crux of the research, these questionnaires were deemed unusable. Questionnaires with most of the questions answered were deemed usable. In most instances (106 out of 121 questionnaires), all questions were answered. Of the 15 questionnaires which did not have all questions answered, 10 of them had one demographic question left blank and 1 of them had 4 demographic questions left blank. Eight respondents left the question about whether they were employed through full-time, part-time, or contract work blank. Two respondents did not provide their age while 2 different respondents did not answer how long they had been working in the construction industry. Four respondents left one item blank within the 20 item question regarding preferences for work-life balance initiatives (Question # 9). These 4 unanswered parts of question 9 were probably an oversight as there was little space left between each part of the question. Each unanswered item was different for each of the 4 respondents; therefore there is no evidence to indicate respondents may have found a particular item offensive or otherwise unanswerable. There is no reason any of the above questionnaires should be unusable as the missing information does not skew the results and the questionnaires still contribute useful information.
### 4.3 Demographics

#### Table 1  Demographic characteristics of sample (n=121)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-29 years</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39 years</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49 years</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59 years</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 years +</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>90.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years worked in construction</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-9</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 years +</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours worked per week</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-29 hours</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39 hours</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49 hours</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>57.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59 hours</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 hours +</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of employment</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time work</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>92.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time work</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract work</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work location</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site-based</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>70.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head office</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job role</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Manager/ Construction Manager/ Site Manager/ Package Manager/ Project Leader</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreman/Supervisor</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Administration</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantity Surveyor/ Estimator/ Commercial Manager</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>33.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering/ Services/ Co-ordination</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Management</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Questions 2 through 8 collected the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The data is shown in Table 1 above. The mean age is undeterminable as responses were only given according to age bracket. Only 17% of females were over 50 years of age whereas 32% of males were over 50 years of age indicating a younger cohort of females in general. Out of the 120 responses to the question on gender, 108 (90 percent) of respondents were male while only 12 (10 percent) were female. A relatively even distribution of respondents existed considering the number of years worked in construction. Out of the 121 responses, 57 percent of respondents worked between 40-49 hours per week whereas 37 percent worked over 50 hours per week and 6 percent worked less than 40 hours per week. When considering the 104 full-time employees only i.e. excluding those employed under part-time and contract working arrangements, 57 percent worked 40-49 hours per week while 40 percent worked over 50 hours per week and 3 percent worked 30-39 hours per week. Of the 113 responses regarding type of employment, the vast majority (104 respondents) had full-time working arrangements. 71 percent of the respondents were based onsite while 29 percent were based in the head office. The largest groups of employees were Quantity Surveyors, Estimators, and Commercial Managers making up 34 percent of respondents and Project Managers, Construction Managers, Site Managers, Package Managers, and Project Leaders making up 33 percent of respondents.
4.4 Overall preference scores

4.4.1 Work-life balance initiatives

Question 9 collected the respondents’ ratings of how useful they deemed various work-life balance initiatives. The survey requested respondents rate the usefulness of different work-life balance initiatives by using a five-point Likert scale (1=not at all useful, 2=of limited use, 3=moderately useful, 4=useful, 5=very useful). They were asked to rate how useful they think each initiative would be for them personally.

The ranking of each initiative based on mean rating scores is shown in Table 2 below. With a mean rating score of 4.23, the work-life balance initiative ‘allowing for flexible work’ was rated as the overall single most useful initiative followed by ‘reimbursing the costs of work related courses and further study’ (4.13), ‘providing a wellness programme’ (4.05), ‘allowing for special family leave’ (4.02), and ‘offering temporary part time work options during a family crisis’ (3.91). With standard deviations ranging from 0.998 to 1.041, these top five initiatives also had the smallest standard deviations out of all of the initiatives.

The work-life balance initiative rated least useful overall was ‘introducing job sharing’ with a mean rating score of 2.13 and standard deviation of 1.147. Ranking second to least preferred was ‘offering part time work options’ with a mean rating score of 2.59 followed by ‘providing an information and referral service to assist with care of elderly parents’ (2.61), ‘providing an information and referral service to assist with care of dependent children’ (2.88), and ‘increasing flexibility in work location’ (3.07). These four initiatives had larger standard deviations between 1.345 and 1.391.
### Table 2  Work-life balance initiative preferences rankings (n=121)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work-life balance initiatives</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Mean Value</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allowing for flexible work hours e.g. starting and finishing half an hour earlier or later</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>0.998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reimbursing the costs of work related courses and further study</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>1.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing a wellness programme i.e. health checks, guest speakers, fitness challenges</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>0.874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing for special family leave e.g. to care for a sick dependent</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering temporary part time work options during a family crisis</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing scholarships for employees' children</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering a fitness programme e.g. discounted gym memberships</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing an employee assistance programme for employees with family problems</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring people take their annual leave regularly</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing a legal information service</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing child care facilities</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering extended parental leave</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing care for children during school holidays</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing assistance with child care costs</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering care on short notice for a child or other dependents</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>1.391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing flexibility in work location e.g. working from home/telecommuting</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing an information and referral service to assist with care of dependent children</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing an information and referral service to assist with care of elderly parents</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>1.362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering part time work options e.g. approximately 25hrs/week</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>1.350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing job sharing where one job is split between 2 people working fewer hours</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4.2 Work-life balance initiative factors

Table 3 Work-life balance initiative factor preferences mean scores (n=121)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Mean Value</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wellness and personal development</strong></td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Allowing for flexible work hours e.g. starting and finishing half an hour earlier or later</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Reimbursing the costs of work related courses and further study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Providing a wellness programme i.e. health checks, guest speakers, fitness challenges</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Offering a fitness programme e.g. discounted gym memberships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Crisis assistance/ support</strong></td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>1.231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Providing an information and referral service to assist with care of elderly parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Offering temporary part time work options during a family crisis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Offering for special family leave e.g. to care for a sick dependent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Providing temporary part time work options during a family crisis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alternative work arrangements</strong></td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; = 3.17</td>
<td>1.438</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Allowing for flexible work hours e.g. starting and finishing half an hour earlier or later</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Offering part time work options e.g. approximately 25hrs/week</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Introducing job sharing where one job is split between 2 people working fewer hours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Increasing flexibility in work location e.g. working from home/telecommuting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Offering temporary part time work options during a family crisis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Childcare support</strong></td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; = 3.17</td>
<td>1.471</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Providing child care facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Offering care on short notice for a child or other dependents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Providing assistance with child care costs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Providing care for children during school holidays</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Offering extended parental leave</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Providing an information and referral service to assist with care of dependent children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The work-life balance initiatives were grouped into factors based on Lingard and Francis’ (2005) analysis using Principal Component Analysis with varimax rotation. Although three of the initiatives related to more than one factor, each factor possessed good internal consistency reliability (Lingard & Francis, 2005). The initiatives that make up each factor and the ranking of respondent preferences for different work-life balance initiative factors based on mean rating scores are shown in Table 3 above.

The factor ‘wellness and personal development’ was rated as the most useful overall with a mean rating score of 4.00 and the smallest standard deviation of 1.042. The second most useful initiative was ‘crisis assistance/ support’ with a mean rating score...
of 3.44 and the second smallest standard deviation of 1.238. ‘Childcare support’ and ‘alternative work arrangements’ tied for the least preferred factors with mean rating scores of 3.17 and the largest standard deviations of 1.471 and 1.438 respectively.

### 4.4.2.1 Comparison by age

#### Table 4 Work-life balance initiative factor preferences mean scores for different age cohorts (n=121)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>18-29 years</th>
<th></th>
<th>30-39 years</th>
<th></th>
<th>40-49 years</th>
<th></th>
<th>50-59 years</th>
<th></th>
<th>60+ years</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Mean Value</td>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Mean Value</td>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Mean Value</td>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Mean Value</td>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Mean Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellness &amp; personal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis assistance/support</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative work</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arrangements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare support</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figure 1](image)

**Figure 1** Respondent preferences for work-life balance initiatives by age cohort (n=121)

The ranking of respondent preferences for work-life balance initiative factors by age is shown in Table 4 and Figure 1 above. Employees within the 18-29 year age group expressed the strongest preference for the factor ‘wellness and personal
development’ whereas employees within the 50-59 year age group expressed the lowest preference for ‘wellness and personal development’.

Employees in the 30-39 year age group expressed the strongest preference for the three factors - alternative work arrangements, crisis assistance support, and childcare support; whereas employees in the 60+ age cohort expressed the lowest preference for these three factors. The order of preference varied by age group.

4.4.2.2 Comparisons by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ranking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellness and personal development</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis assistance/ support</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative work arrangements</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare support</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ranking of respondent preferences for work-life balance initiative factors by gender is shown in Table 5 and Figure 2 above. In general, women expressed a higher preference than men for all work-life balance initiative factors. The factor ‘alternative work arrangement’ was rated the second most useful by women whereas men rated ‘crisis assistance/support’ as second most preferred. Childcare support
was rated as least useful by women and only 0.01 of a preference point above least useful by men.

4.4.2.3 Comparisons by Work Location

Table 6 Work-life balance initiative factor preferences mean scores for different work locations (n=121)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Site-based</th>
<th></th>
<th>Head Office</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ranking</td>
<td>Mean Value</td>
<td>Ranking</td>
<td>Mean Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellness and personal development</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis assistance/ support</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative work arrangements</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare support</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3 Respondent preferences for work-life balance initiatives by work location (n=121)

The ranking of respondent preferences for work-life balance initiative factors by work location is shown in Table 6 and Figure 3. The factors were ranked in the same order of preference for site and head office based employees with the highest preference being for wellness and personal development initiatives followed by crisis assistance/support, alternative work arrangement, and childcare support initiatives in order of decreasing preference. The mean rating scores by work location for each factor were all very similar with the greatest difference being only 0.11 of a preference point.
4.5 Working hours

Table 7  Hours worked per week by job role (n=121)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours worked per week</th>
<th>Project/Construction/Site/Package Managers &amp; Project Leaders</th>
<th>Quantity Surveyors, Estimators, &amp; Commercial Managers</th>
<th>Foremen &amp; Supervisors</th>
<th>Site Administration</th>
<th>Engineering, Services, &amp; Coordination</th>
<th>Upper Management</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hours</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-29</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>80.5%</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4  Hours worked per week by Quantity Surveyors, Estimators, and Commercial Managers

Figure 5  Hours worked per week by Project/Construction/Site/Package Managers & Project Leaders

Table 7 shows the hours worked per week by all groups of employees. Considering the two largest groups of respondents, Figure 4 shows 82 percent of Quantity Surveyors, Estimators, and Commercial Managers worked 40-49 hours per week.
Surveyors, Estimators, and Commercial Managers work 40-49 hours per week, 12 percent work 50-59 hours per week, and 5 percent work 60 or more hours per week. Figure 5 above shows 44 percent of Project Managers, Construction Managers, Site Managers, Package Managers, and Project Leaders work 40-49 hours per week, 43 percent work 50-59 hours per week, and 15 percent work 60 or more hours per week.

Table 8 Hours worked per week by location (n=121)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours worked per week</th>
<th>Head Office</th>
<th>Site-based</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-29 hours</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39 hours</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49 hours</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59 hours</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 hours +</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6 Hours worked per week by head office employees

Figure 7 Hours worked per week by site-based employees
Table 8 above shows the hours worked per week by head office and site-based employees. Figure 6 shows 66 percent of respondents based in the head office work 40-49 hours per week, 23 percent work 50-59 hours per week, 0 percent work 60 or more hours per week, while 11 percent work under 40 hours per week. Figure 7 shows 53 percent of site-based respondents work 40-49 hours per week, 33 percent work 50-59 hours per week, and 11 percent work 60 or more hours per week, while 3 percent work under 40 hours per week.

4.6 Open ended questions

Questions 11 and 12 were open ended questions at the end of the questionnaire which asked respondents if there were any other initiatives they would find useful and if there were any other comments they would like to make. The coded and tabulated results are shown in table 9 below. 41 out of 121 respondents provided answers to one or both of the optional open ended questions. 12 people suggested having more social events including sport, recreation, and entertainment, with and without family. 9 people mentioned that they liked the current fitness initiatives and/or they would enjoy more fitness initiatives such as weight loss programmes, sponsored events, and incentives. The third most discussed topic regarding work-life balance initiatives mentioned by 7 people was the need for reduced working hours and or reduced weekend work. 6 people mentioned that flexible work options such as flexible working hours were desirable. 3 people mentioned the need for some sort of compensation for working overtime. Another 3 people suggested the desire to have more annual leave, and another 3 people would like the company to offer more discounts on items such as building materials and travel. 2 respondents suggested initiatives for each of the following: better job cover when absent, health care, and a day to do charity work.
Table 9  Frequency of suggestions for additional work-life balance initiatives and comments (n=121)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggested Work-Life Balance Initiative</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social events</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness/Health</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced working hours and/or weekend work</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible work options</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overtime compensation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual leave</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discounts</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Cover when absent</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charity work day</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.7 Summary

Chapter 4 presented a preliminary analysis of the data that was compiled from the responses to the questionnaire. First the demographic information was presented. Respondents’ preferences for individual work-life balance initiatives and work-life balance initiative factors were ranked based on mean preference scores followed by comparisons based on gender, age, and work location. Then an assessment of hours worked according to job locations and job roles was presented. Chapter 5 will discuss the findings presented in this chapter.
5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 discusses the findings presented in Chapter 4. First the demographic information is discussed followed by an in depth investigation of the resultant preferences for work-life balance initiatives whereby the research question ‘What are employees’ preferences for work-life balance initiatives in a large construction company within New Zealand?’ is addressed. The findings are compared with previous research, especially Lingard and Francis’ (2005) study, upon which this research was based. This is followed by a discussion surrounding working hours addressing the sub-research question ‘What working hours do employees carry out in a large New Zealand construction company?’

5.2 The questions

The questionnaire (refer appendix A) contained seven questions asking for demographic information followed by one question asking employees to rate their preference for 20 different work-life balance initiatives. Two open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire allowed employees to suggest any further useful work-life balance initiatives or comment on the topic in general. Although most of the returned questionnaires were completely filled out, some of the respondents left certain questions blank. Although it is not possible to know why they were left blank, giving respondents the option to not answer any given question is important so as (1) not to pressure the respondent and (2) to achieve the best possible response rate. When a certain question is skipped by multiple respondents, this may indicate the question is sensitive or the respondents may have felt they could be identified if the question was answered. Eight respondents left the question about whether they were employed through full-time, part-time, or contract work which indicates this question may have been sensitive. If the questionnaire is used in future research, this question may need to be left out. The questions regarding age and number of years worked in construction were each left blank two times. This is a relatively small number, so the question may not have been overly sensitive to respondents in
5.3 Demographic information

Considering the demographic information retrieved as shown in Table 1 (page 40), some of the distributions were similar to that shown in Lingard and Francis’ (2005) study. Although the average age of respondents in this study was indeterminable, the gender distribution throughout the different age groups showed only 17% of females were over 50 years of age whereas 32% of males were over 50 years of age indicating a younger cohort of females in general. The demographic information in Lingard and Francis’ (2005) study also showed a younger cohort of females whereby male respondents’ average age was 41 years while females’ average age was 31 years. Respondents in this study were made up of 90 percent males and only 10 percent females which is a similar make up to that of Lingard and Francis’ (2005) study showing respondents were made up of 88 percent male and 12 percent female. The low percentage yet younger cohort of females suggests that these large construction companies are still largely male dominated, but more females may be starting to enter the industry.

5.4 Work-life balance initiatives

This research was based on a similar research project carried out in Australia which asked employees of a large construction company to rate their preferences for various work-life balance initiatives (Lingard & Francis, 2005). The survey requested respondents rate the usefulness of different work-life balance initiatives by using a five-point Likert scale (1=not at all useful, 2=of limited use, 3=moderately useful, 4=useful, 5=very useful). Taking into account the responses, Lingard and Francis (2005) grouped the various work-life balance initiatives into factors using Principal Component Analysis with varimax rotation. The factors that they discerned, which are also used for the purposes of this study, are: ‘wellness and personal development’; ‘crisis assistance/support’; ‘childcare support’; and ‘alternative work arrangements’. Lingard and Francis (2005) presented and discussed their results by showing the overall employee preference for each factor.
followed by different demographic groups’ preferences for the various factors. This current research assesses employee preference for the factors in a similar manner and then compares these to Lingard and Francis’ (2005) results. Prior to this and in addition, the ranking of individual work-life balance initiatives as shown in Table 2 (page 43) is discussed.

5.4.1 Individual work-life balance initiatives

Considering the top five ranked work-life balance initiatives, the initiative ‘allowing for flexible work e.g. starting and finishing half an hour earlier or later’ was rated as the overall single most useful initiative followed by ‘reimbursing the costs of work related courses and further study’, ‘providing a wellness programme i.e. health checks, guest speakers, fitness challenges’, ‘allowing for special family leave e.g. to care for a sick dependent’, and ‘offering temporary part time work options during a family crisis’. The fact that these top five initiatives also had the smallest standard deviations means that they were not only the most preferred but also the most agreed upon by employees. Considering the five least preferred work-life balance initiatives, ‘introducing job sharing where one job is split between 2 people working fewer hours’ was rated least useful overall with a standard deviation of 1.147. This standard deviation is relatively low indicating a relatively high level of agreement about the initiative being ranked as least preferred overall. After job sharing, the least preferred initiatives were ‘offering part time work options e.g. approximately 25hrs/week’, ‘providing an information and referral service to assist with care of elderly parents’, ‘providing an information and referral service to assist with care of dependent children’, and ‘increasing flexibility in work location e.g. working from home/telecommuting’. These four initiatives had relatively large standard deviations which indicates there was less agreement regarding employee preference for these initiatives, in other words there was a greater variation in perceived utility of these initiatives.

The ranking of ‘allowing for flexible work e.g. starting and finishing half an hour earlier or later’ as the most important initiative to employees overall is not surprising as the Department of Labour’s (2006) snapshot of employee and employer attitudes
and experiences showed many New Zealanders would like more flexible start and finish times. In addition, extant literature documents flexible working arrangements as highly important to New Zealanders (Department of Labour, 2006; Department of Labour Work-Life Balance Project, 2004; Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, 2003, 2005; McPherson & Reed, 2007).

The qualitative information gathered is congruent with the ranking of ‘allowing for flexible work’ as the most preferred initiative as a relatively large number of comments regarding flexible working options were made in the open ended questions at the end of the survey. One employee stated they would like “anything that reduces time spent in a car [such as] flexi-time or working from home”, and similarly another suggested having “extended flexibility of hours to cope with Auckland’s major traffic and commuting delays, to and from work.” Still another respondent felt that “work-life balance could be improved by allowing a clearly defined ‘flexi-time’ approach to work and a more flexible approach to holidays.”

The Department of Labour (n.d.-a) describes flexi-time as having a set number of core working hours where employees must be present but allowing employees to choose their start and finish times around these core hours to suit their needs. More broadly speaking, flexi-time can also include options that allow employees to vary their weekly and yearly work patterns (Department of Labour, n.d.-a).

Research shows providing such initiatives could be beneficial on many levels. One study showed having more time-flexible working options was linked to employee loyalty, fewer missed deadlines, and decreased stress and time off work (Halpern, 2005) while another study showed flexible workplaces had higher rates of employee job engagement, job satisfaction, intention to stay with the company, mental wellbeing, and lower rates of stress and negative spillover (Families and Work Institute, 2008b).

The New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development (2006) describes a wider scope of flexible work options which includes “career breaks, extended maternity and paternity leave, paid dependency leave, job share, subsidised healthcare and leave for community, sports and volunteer work” (p. 3). Therefore the high
rankings of ‘allowing for special family leave e.g. to care for a sick dependent’ (4th ranked), and ‘offering temporary part time work options during a family crisis’ (5th ranked) do not come as a surprise. In line with this quantitative data, one qualitative response stated that it was important to “provide flexibility of work hours to all employees especially in times of crisis.” Another respondent recognises some of the adverse effects of a successful career in the industry and points out that the changing workforce and subsequent provision of more flexible working arrangements may have positive effects for all employees:

*The key issue in construction is that our personalities are generally "goal driven". To achieve success... requires intense focus. This tends to fill our industry with [people] who leave behind them a trail of broken relationships whether with spouse or children or family. ...the industry has been dominated by men over most of [my career] and the "absent" workaholic father has been extremely common. As more women have entered the workforce, child care issues have become more prevalent. These may force more flexible working habits that are useful for all employees.*

Considering the wider scope of flexible work options, it might then be expected that the following initiatives would have been ranked higher as well: ‘offering extended parental leave’ (12th ranked), ‘increasing flexibility in work location e.g. working from home/telecommuting’ (16th ranked), ‘offering part time work options e.g. approximately 25hrs/week’ (19th ranked), and ‘introducing job sharing’ (20th ranked). There are likely to be different reasons for the unexpected rankings which are put forward here, although it is impossible to decipher the causality of the rankings due to the style of survey. The fact that 90 percent of respondents were men may have influenced the ranking of ‘offering extended parental leave’, ‘offering part time work options’, and ‘introducing job sharing’ since traditionally and typically it tends to be women who reduce their working hours to care for dependents. Hence a large portion of men may not find these initiatives very useful.
Possible reasons for the low ranking of the initiative ‘increasing flexibility in work location e.g. working from home/telecommuting’ may be due to the type of jobs being carried out. For example, depending on job role it may be mandatory for employees within the construction industry to be physically present at work due to the nature of the job.

It appears that the providing information and referral services to assist with children or elderly dependents are not highly valued and other initiatives are more helpful. The reasons for this may be that respondents already feel they have enough information to carry out these duties.

The second place ranking of ‘reimbursing the costs of work related courses and further study’ is not particularly surprising as the provision of this initiative is highly valuable. The company paying for work related courses and continuing education is likely useful to a wide-ranging, large number of employees as the high mean rating score and low standard deviation indicate. Similarly the third place ranking of ‘providing a wellness programme i.e. health checks, guest speakers, fitness challenges’ is also likely to appeal to a large number of employees from various demographic groups. In the open ended questions at the end of the questionnaire, there were a relatively large number of qualitative responses expressing interest in health and fitness initiatives which supports the high rating of the initiative ‘providing a wellness programme’ shown in the quantitative data analysis. Some respondents expressed appreciation for the initiatives already provided by the company while others would like to see even more provided. One employee stated “it would be good to introduce a weight loss programme with the assistance from the likes of Jenny Craig’s or Weight Watchers, not just for weight loss but also to adopt a ... healthier future.” Other respondents suggested providing fitness checks, gym memberships near site, fun runs/walks, and blood pressure monitors for site. Another respondent stated “some sort of incentive scheme to ride your bike to work in lieu of driving would be great.” While another gave an overview of the benefits of such initiatives saying “fitness incentives can create good team bonding and are a very worthwhile method of making people aware of what they are missing out on and also help a greater work / life balance.”
5.4.2 Work-life balance initiative factors

Table 3 (page 44) shows the grouping of work-life balance initiatives into factors and the subsequent ranking of the initiatives based on mean preference scores. The initiatives were grouped into factors in order to gain insight into whether certain categories of initiatives might be more useful to employees overall and by different demographic groupings. The factors as defined by Lingard and Francis’ (2005) study were relied upon for this study.

The factor ‘wellness and personal development’ ranked as the most useful overall with the lowest standard deviation followed by ‘crisis assistance/support’, ‘childcare support’, and ‘alternative work arrangements’ which both ranked least preferred with an equal mean preference score of 3.17. It is important to note that, although these were least preferred, the mean rating score of 3.17 is still equivalent to the initiatives being slightly more than ‘moderately useful’. The first place ranking of ‘wellness and personal development’ is not surprising. Initiatives that fall into this category are likely useful to a wide range of employees, and their family structure, age, or gender may not significantly limit how useful they are. The qualitative data also supports the high ranking of this factor. As discussed in the previous section, there were many qualitative comments supporting the usefulness of initiatives in this category.

Lingard and Francis’ (2005) results are strikingly similar in terms of order of ranking and variation in standard deviations as shown in Table 10 and 11 below. The factors are ranked in the same order in both companies with the exception of ‘alternative work arrangements’ and ‘childcare support’ ranking third equal tying for least preferred in the New Zealand study as opposed to ‘childcare support’ ranking fourth and ‘alternative work arrangements’ ranking third. Interestingly, judging from the mean values, or mean preference scores, all of the factors show a slightly lower score in the Australian study which, on face value, suggests that the Australian respondents find all of the initiatives slightly less useful than the respondents in the New Zealand study. This difference may be real but also may be due to other factors such as
cultural differences in terms of interpreting or expressing preference using the rating scale.

Notably, the resulting standard deviations in both studies get larger as the rankings decrease. That is, the standard deviation for the most preferred factor ‘wellness and personal development’ is smallest and in turn standard deviations increase for ‘crisis assistance/support’, ‘alternative work arrangements’, and ‘childcare support’. This indicates that, in both studies, ‘wellness and personal development’ is not only rated as most useful, but respondents were also in the highest amount of agreement regarding the utility of this factor compared to the others.

Table 10 Work-life balance initiative factor preferences mean scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Mean Value</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Childcare support</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>1.471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative work arrangements</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>1.438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis assistance/support</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>1.231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellness and personal development</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.042</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11 Adapted from Lingard and Francis (2005) work-life balance initiative factor preferences mean scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Mean value</th>
<th>Std deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Childcare support</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>1.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative work arrangements</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>1.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis assistance/support</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>.932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellness and personal development</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>.919</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4.3 Comparisons by demographic groups

In the following sections, the factor mean preference scores and the order in which they are ranked by various demographic groups are analysed and compared to Lingard and Francis’ (2005) results.

5.4.3.1 Comparisons by age

Both studies’ ranking of respondent preferences for work-life balance initiative factors by age is shown in Figures 8 and 9 below.

‘Wellness and personal development’ was by far the most preferred factor for all age cohorts in both studies. Employees within the 18-29 year age group expressed the strongest preference for the factor ‘wellness and personal development’ in both studies. Although the ranking order for the ‘wellness and personal development’ factor among age cohorts is not identical in the two studies, they are very similar; age cohorts 30-39 and 40-49 preferred the factor slightly less than those under 30 years of age, and the age groups 50-59 and 60+ preferred the factor less than those younger than 50 years of age. This indicates a general decreasing of importance for this factor with age.

In both studies, the 60+ age cohort expressed the least interest in the remaining three factors: alternative work arrangements, crisis assistance support, and childcare support. This current study’s results show the 30-39 year age cohort expressed the greatest interest in these three initiatives, but this was not the case in Lingard and Francis’ (2005) study although compared with the other age cohorts the 30-39 age group did show a relatively strong preference for these initiatives.

The fact that order of preference for various initiatives varied by age group indicates utility of different initiatives varies with age. For example, childcare support was ranked least preferred for the 50-59 year and 60+ age brackets, whereas it was ranked second most useful for the 30-39 year age cohort behind ‘wellness and personal development’. This is to be expected as respondents were asked to rate the initiatives according to how useful they would be to them personally. Respondents over 50 years of age likely have far fewer needs for childcare support than the 30-39 year age group.
Figure 8  Reproduced from chapter 4, respondent preferences for work-life balance initiatives factors by age cohort (n=121)

Figure 9  Adapted from Lingard and Francis (2005), respondent preferences for work-life balance initiative factors by age cohort (n=202)
5.4.3.2 Comparisons by gender

In both studies, both genders expressed the highest preference for the factor ‘wellness and personal development’. In the current New Zealand study, females expressed a higher preference for all factors whereas this was not the case in the Australian study where females preferred the factors ‘wellness and personal development’ and ‘alternative work arrangements’ more than males while males rated ‘crisis assistance/support’ and ‘childcare support’ as more useful than females. These differences between the companies may be due to a different make up of respondents’ family structures between the companies although this cannot be explored as the current study did not request information regarding respondents’ family structure. Lingard and Francis’ (2005) study showed employees with partners and dependent children preferred the childcare support initiatives the most whereas those without dependent children preferred them the least.

The ranking order of factors was the same in each company comparing both groups of males and both groups of females as shown in Figures 10 and 11 below. That is, the ranking of factors for females in both companies was as follows: (1) ‘wellness and personal development’, (2) ‘alternative work arrangements’ (3) ‘crisis assistance/support’ and (4) ‘childcare support’. Whereas the ranking of factors for males was: (1) ‘wellness and personal development’, (2) ‘crisis assistance/support’ (3) ‘alternative work arrangements’ and (4) ‘childcare support’. This once again shows that the perceived usefulness of different types of initiatives varies among different demographic groups.
Figure 10 Reproduced from chapter 4, respondent preferences for work-life balance initiative factors by gender (n=121)

Figure 11 Adapted from Lingard and Francis (2005), respondent preferences for work-life balance initiative factors by gender (n=202)
5.4.3.3 Comparisons by work location
The ranking of respondent preferences for work-life balance initiative factors by work location is shown in Table 6 and Figure 3 (page 47). Lingard and Francis’ (2005) study did not analyse their results in this manner so a comparison cannot be made here. The fact that the ranking of factors is very similar for employees working in head office and on-site in this study suggests that the difference in preference for the various initiatives does not stem from type of working environment or length of working hours but may be more associated with respondents’ demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and family structure. Since site-based employees tend to work longer hours than employees in head office, it might have been expected that site-based employees might show a higher preference for work-life balance initiatives, but the results do not support this assumption. It appears that the initiatives are valued equally by employees who work different hours and in different locations.

5.4.4 Work-life balance initiatives - Summary of findings and implications
This study’s quantitative results indicate that employee preferences for different types of work-life balance initiatives vary among different demographic groups. In addition, a wide variety of qualitative responses suggesting various initiatives were given in response to the open ended questions. The triangulation of the results via two different methods of data collection has given greater support and meaning to the findings. These findings are in agreement with a conclusion from Lingard and Francis’ (2005) study which states “there is no ‘one size fits all’ solution to work-life balance in the construction industry” (p. 1053). These results suggest that the provision of a wide variety of initiatives from which employees can choose during different stages in their life and career is ideal. As reported by De Cieri et al. (2005) the more initiatives that are offered, the more likely they are to be used.
Furthermore, Kossek et al. (2010) argues that implementing work-life balance initiatives which accommodate a diverse range of employees leads to having higher quality employees which in turn increase firm performance and competitive advantage.
Although the provision of a multitude of work-life balance initiatives is desirable, initiatives can be expensive for companies to implement. Because of this, organisations tend to offer different work-life balance initiatives to reflect the particular needs of employees (Bardoel et al., 1999). As one respondent in the current study states, “most of these initiatives would be useful to the employee, however if a business is to succeed they have to work with the employer as well.”

As suggested by Townsend et al. (2006a) “employee voice presents as an important resource for managers and policy-makers in determining work-life balance policies for industry, workplaces and individual employees” (p. 2). Information retrieved from employees can provide valuable insight for companies who wish to understand the needs and preferences of their workforce. The type of information gathered in this study can be useful when considering which initiatives to implement to suit a particular company. It also may be important to provide initiatives that appeal to the type of employees the company would like to attract.

5.4.5 Support

It is important to note that the provision of work-life balance initiatives alone is not effective without other supports in place. A large body of research (Dallimore & Mickel, 2006; De Cieri et al., 2005; Eaton, 2003; Kossek et al., 2010; Smith & Gardner, 2007) shows that if an organisation wants to provide effective and usable work-life balance initiatives, it is extremely important to ensure the organisational culture, managers and supervisors show support for such initiatives. Employee perception of organisational support for an individual’s work-life balance has been related to increased job satisfaction and reduced work pressure, both of which reduce leaving intention (Forsyth & Polzer-Debruyne, 2007). As one employee states, “we need to make our employees feel valued and looked after achieving a sense of loyalty from them to the company. Quality staff cost a lot more to replace than lose.”

Kossek et al. (2010) suggest management and supervisors should not only be trained and encouraged to be supportive but also held accountable for and assessed on exhibiting such qualities. One respondent in this study suggested the “introduction of work-life balance training courses targeted at Senior Management Positions concentrating on understanding and getting the best out of fellow employee's at work
to improve business efficiencies and a better work life balance.” Further to workplace support of initiatives, it is also important that employees know what initiatives are available and how to go about using them (J. M. Haar & Spell, 2004; Smith & Gardner, 2007).

5.5 Working hours

This study’s findings on working hours are in line with much of the other research (Brown et al., 2009; Lingard & Francis, 2004a; Lingard et al., 2008) that report employees within the construction industry tend to work long hours. The Department of Labour (2006) defines a standard workweek as working 38-44 hours and very long hours as working 50 or more hours per week. As reported from the 2006 census data, 23 percent of the New Zealand workforce works over 50 hours per week (Department of Labour and Families Commission, 2008). Considering all types of employees in the current study, 37 percent worked 50 or more hours per week whereas when considering full time employees only, 40 percent reported working very long hours. Similarly, 40 percent of the respondents in Lingard and Francis’ (2005) study worked 50 or more hours per week (22 percent worked 50-59 hours and 18 percent worked 60+ hours per week).

Because Quantity Surveyors, Estimators, and Commercial Managers made up 34 percent of respondents and Project Managers, Construction Managers, Site Managers, Package Managers, and Project Leaders made up 33 percent of respondents, these two groups were of a significantly large size to examine on an individual basis. The former group of employees reported working significantly longer hours on average than the latter. As shown in Table 7 and Figures 4 and 5 (page 50), only 17 percent of Quantity Surveyors, Estimators, and Commercial Managers work very long hours while 58 percent of Project Managers, Construction Managers, Site Managers, Package Managers, and Project Leaders work very long hours. This reveals a very high portion of the latter group of employees regularly work very long hours (50 or more hours per week). This study does not explore whether respondents feel they have work-life balance or experience work-life conflict so the implications of this group of employees working particularly long
hours cannot be explored. These results suggest that the necessity to work very long hours varies depending on job role. A possible reason for this is likely to be because of different demands within different job roles. For example, Construction Managers often have to meet very tight daily deadlines which may affect a project’s overall progress and completion date, hence they may often feel the need to stay late or work weekends to meet these deadlines. Another possible reason for this is that the job characteristics of some positions such as Site Managers or Superintendents necessitate supervision of subcontractors who are carrying out their works on the weekend.

When examining the difference between working hours by work location, Table 8 and Figures 6 and 7 (page 51) show site-based employees work longer hours. Twenty-three percent of employees based in head office work 50 or more hours per week whereas significantly more employees that are site-based (44 percent) undertake very long working hours (50+ hours per week), once again revealing a specific group of employees who are more prone to working very long hours. Similarly, Australian research shows site-based employees of a large Australian construction firm worked longer hours than those in the head or regional offices and experienced higher levels of work interference with personal life, higher levels of exhaustion, and lower satisfaction with pay (Lingard & Francis, 2004b). Once again, this study does not explore respondents’ experience of work-life balance or imbalance, but it is possible that site-based employees experience similar symptoms of work-life conflict as reported in Lingard and Francis’ (2004b) study. Lingard and Francis’ (2004b) study also showed that a significantly higher percentage of site-based employees would prefer reduced working hours and more time off, and qualitative comments revealed site-based employees expressed the most concern about working weekends (Lingard & Francis, 2004b). These results suggest that work location affects working hour demands. Possible reasons for this could be due to the different job roles carried out in the different locations or the immediacy of project demands on-site.

The quantitative data regarding working hours lend support to the assertion that employees within the construction industry tend to work long hours. When analysed
more thoroughly, the data showed a substantial amount of variance in working hour demands linked with to job role and work location.

5.5.1 Working hours - Qualitative comments

Many of the qualitative comments from this study addressed issues of long working hours and weekend work. One respondent expressed the view that long hours must be accepted as part of working in the construction industry:

*The construction industry is an extremely CHALLENGING game to get into----but the rewards are fantastic, not necessarily money wise but from a personal achievement point of view. If you want to run a large project and have the outcome of success, you had better be prepared to put in the long hours. To do so, you need a very understanding family also.*

Similarly, the Building Industry Consultative Council in Victoria (MacKenzie, 2008) concluded employees of the construction industry find their work very satisfying but they also are ‘collectively weary’ about the overall adverse impact on family, mental and physical wellbeing that stem from the confrontational, high pressure work combined with long working hours characteristic of the industry (p. 53).

Multiple respondents express the need for reduced working hours or a shorter work week. One suggestion is for “*reducing the number of working hours [and] increasing the number of paid annual holidays in line with more EU countries.*” Another respondent suggests providing “*at least every second weekend off*” while another respondent declares

*[Saturday work] should not be expected by head office and not be thought of as our standard week. Otherwise another pay structure should be put in place for the workers on a salary, that they are rewarded for it, being a day in lieu or paid time and a quarter*
One employee’s insight about work-life balance and working Saturdays was as follows: “It is important that work does not override your family life. Partners and children should be recognized and appreciated as family life is often overlooked... e.g. Saturday working when most families are involved in sport.”

Another employee expressed the need to reduce “peer pressure to be at work for longer when not necessary” and terms this “non-productive ‘appearance sake’ attendance”. Similarly, Townsend et al.’s (2006a) research showed employees reported “substantial levels of peer pressure within the industry in relation to working hours [and] pressure to be at work on Saturdays, even if there’s nothing to do except read the paper” (p. 14).

One respondent suggests monitoring work hours is a possible way of addressing the issue of long working hours:

monitoring work hours by keeping daily time sheets on high pressure jobs.... ensures the right people and numbers are brought into projects to keep hours down, makes people more efficient by making them accountable for their hours of work [and] creates better time management

5.5.2 Working Hours - Summary of findings and implications

The quantitative results from the question which asked employees how many hours per week they worked on average showed 37 percent of all respondents work very long hours (50+ hours per week). The data also showed that average hours worked per week vary significantly according to job role and location. Some of the qualitative responses to the open ended questions at the end of the survey express concern over long hours and weekend work in association with work-life balance. By gathering both quantitative and qualitative data regarding working hours, triangulation of the results was able to provide a more meaningful understanding of the data. Although the study did not examine employee level of work-life balance or conflict, the qualitative results suggest there is some conflict associated with working long hours and weekend work.
These findings are not surprising as the Department of Labour (2006) census reported a major source of conflict was that many New Zealanders work long and unpaid additional hours and that many New Zealanders would like more time away from work. Other research found many New Zealanders work long hours and are not compensated for working overtime causing a sentiment of being undervalued in terms of pay and their lives outside of work (The New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, 2002). Australian research in the construction industry has shown a division between waged and salaried workers where waged workers aim to work overtime because of their pay structure while salaried workers would either prefer not to work overtime or similarly be compensated for working overtime (Lingard et al., 2008; Townsend et al., 2006b; Townsend et al., 2008). Regardless of compensation for working long hours, many employees in the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions’ (2002) study felt they did not have control over hours worked nor adequate time to spend with family or in activities outside of work. Others reported being negatively affected by unpredictable and unexpected working hours arising at the end of the day, due to shift changes, or weekend work. Implications of extended hours and weekend work as reported by a group of Australian construction industry employees include issues such as marital problems, not enough rest or time for children, and lack of a social life (Townsend et al., 2006a).

An in-depth qualitative study of employees from large New Zealand businesses showed strong interest in compressed workweeks (UMR Research Limited, 2003). Multiple studies (Brown et al., 2009; Lingard et al., 2008; Townsend et al., 2006b) have investigated sites which have attempted to address the issue of long working hours and weekend work by altering the workweek in different ways. These alterations were mainly carried out in project alliances where the client supported the initiatives and hence the companies had a greater ability to provide such initiatives. Greatly reducing hours had an adverse affect on waged workers take-home pay. The studies found that a compressed workweek where employees work a similar amount of hours Monday through Friday as opposed to Monday through Saturday, so that they were able to have a 2-day weekend, was suitable for both waged and salaried
employees. Other alternatives included rostered Saturday work for salaried employees to accommodate the different groups of employees.

These studies show that there can be significant detrimental effects on employees from long working hours and weekend work, but that there are also significant hurdles to being able to adequately implement initiatives that fulfil all employees’ needs.

It is important that companies continue to address these issues in order to find a balance that is suitable to employees, companies, and the industry as a whole in order to provide and maintain sustainable working environments.

5.6 Qualitative responses

Where appropriate, qualitative responses supporting the relevant topics have been included in the previous sections of this report. More of the responses to the open-ended questions are discussed here.

5.6.1 Social events

When asked if there were any additional initiatives employees would find useful, the type of initiative most suggested was social events such as sporting events, functions, parties, and social clubs. The literature does not include social events as a type of work-life balance initiative therefore a literature review regarding this type of initiative has not been carried out.

The qualitative responses suggest that social events encourage team building and co-workers getting to know one another. One employee expressed a preference for the social events and suggests providing "site organised team functions that don't necessarily involve cutting into normal work hours" and states that they help "build team relationships." Another employee lists some activities they would like to see provided including "sports days, family Christmas parties, team building trips, and a social club that organises tramping or skiing trips." Another suggestion was to "create sports teams within [the] company and play games regularly." There were multiple comments in support of family events, sporting events, and social clubs.
5.6.2 Health and fitness initiatives

The second highest number of comments regarding initiatives had to do with health and fitness initiatives. Respondents either expressed that they liked the current fitness initiatives provided by the company or they would like even more initiatives to be provided in the realm of health and fitness. These qualitative comments support the quantitative data derived from the respondents’ rating of the 20 different work-life balance initiatives in question 9 which show the factor ‘wellness and personal development’ was ranked as most useful to employees overall. The comments are discussed in section 5.4.1 (page 59) above.

5.6.3 Working hours

The next three most popular topics mentioned for work-life balance initiatives had to do with working hours. Seven people mentioned the desire for reduced working hours or reduced weekend work. Another seven people suggested that having more flexible working arrangements would be desirable such as flexi-time policies and flexible work during times of crisis. Also, three people mentioned the need to be compensated for working overtime, either by means of pay or by accrual of days in lieu. These comments are also discussed in sections 5.4.1 (pages 57 & 58) and 5.5.1 (pages 70 & 71) above.

5.6.4 Other Comments

There were multiple other suggestions for various work-life balance initiatives. Some employees addressed the issue of the need for better job cover when absent in association with work-life balance as addressed in the following two statements:

*The difficulty with management generally, is who will do my job if I am unable to be at work for whatever reason? To be able to build some flexibility into the management structure, to allow for short term unexpected absences whilst retaining maximum productivity and job satisfaction is desired. We all have lives & responsibilities outside of work whether they are children or parents or spouse and events will arise that require response.*
The ability to do so is a key to building and maintaining those relationships

The disadvantage of taking holidays is the build up of work on return when there is no one to cover your role. It is often said it wasn’t worth taking the 1 week holiday when you have 2 weeks of work to address on your first day back

A few suggestions had to do with personal development. One person suggested providing a “work-life forum facility [where] staff can publish their own work-life experience to inspire others.” Another suggested “greater access to technical, educational, motivational, ‘Life-Balance’ reading/material to all staff wishing to better themselves.” Another suggested initiatives to deal with “stress and counselling assistance.”

A few employees mentioned they thought a large company should provide more discounts on things ranging from accommodation to building products. Others would like to see more annual leave provided. While two people suggested having a day off to do charity work. There were many more one-off comments suggesting a variety of different work-life balance initiatives. The range in qualitative responses shows that employees are interested in a wide variety of initiatives.

5.7 Summary

This chapter has discussed the results presented in chapter 4. Findings from the quantitative data were discussed and qualitative responses were incorporated into the discussion to provide more richness and explanation where possible. First the main research question ‘What are employees’ preferences for work-life balance initiatives in a large construction company within New Zealand?’ was addressed. The quantitative results showed that the work-life balance initiatives factor ‘wellness and personal development’ was perceived as most useful to employees overall and within the various demographic groups. The other factors were ranked in different orders of preference by different demographic groups. Qualitative responses from employees suggested a wide variety of different work-life balance initiatives. In line with other
studies (Lingard & Francis, 2005; New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development, 2006; Yasbek, 2004), these findings support the notion that there is no on-size-fits-all policy appropriate for all companies or set of employees and that the provision of a wide variety of initiatives from which employees can choose during different stages in their life and career is ideal. The focus was then shifted to answering the sub-research question ‘What working hours do employees carry out in a large New Zealand construction company?’ The quantitative results regarding working hours showed 37 percent of all respondents work very long hours (50+ hours per week) whereas average hours worked per week vary considerably according to job role and location. Some of the qualitative responses from employees express concern over long hours and weekend work which suggests long working hours and weekend work give rise to work-life conflict for some employees. Conclusions from this study are presented in the following chapter.
6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the research and summarises important findings and conclusions drawn. Limitations of the current research and suggestions for future research are put forward.

6.2 The research

The literature review revealed that there is no one-size-fits-all work-life balance policy appropriate for all companies and that different work-life balance initiatives are more suitable for certain demographic groups. The literature review also revealed a large portion of research which addressed long working hours and weekend work in relation to work-life conflict in the construction industry. Extensive research on work-life balance within the New Zealand construction industry does not exist, but surmising from Australian research, there is a significant amount of work-life imbalance in the industry. One particular study assessed employee preferences for work-life balance initiatives in two Australian construction companies which suggested further study be carried out in other countries (Lingard & Francis, 2005). The current study furthers this research by addressing the question ‘What are employees’ preferences for work-life balance initiatives in a large construction company in New Zealand?’ Furthermore, in relation to the abundance of research regarding working hours the research answers the question ‘What working hours do employees carry out in a large New Zealand construction company?’

A descriptive and analytical questionnaire based on Lingard and Francis’ (2005) questionnaire was developed using the web based software SurveyMonkey and administered via email to all managerial and professional employees related to construction projects within the company. The use of the survey method allowed the study to achieve its aim of collecting a cross-section of wide-ranging, empirical data from a large number of respondents in a relatively short amount of time. The demographic and Likert scale questions allowed quantitative collection of attitudinal
information enabling analysis of working hours, work-life balance initiatives and factors, and direct comparison with Lingard and Francis’ (2005) results. Through the exercise of triangulation, the inclusion of the qualitative open ended questions at the end of the questionnaire allowed more meaningful and in-depth rationalisations of the quantitative results to be put forward.

6.3 General findings

The quantitative results regarding work-life balance initiatives showed the top three most preferred initiatives were ‘allowing for flexible work e.g. starting and finishing half an hour earlier or later’, ‘reimbursing the costs of work related courses and further study’, and ‘providing a wellness programme i.e. health checks, guest speakers, fitness challenges’. The strongest preference for the work-life balance initiatives factor overall and within the various demographic groups was ‘wellness and personal development’ which is similar to Lingard and Francis’ (2005) findings. It is likely that these top three most preferred initiatives and the most preferred factor have ranked highest because they are appropriate for a wide variety of demographic groups. Also similar to Lingard and Francis’ (2005) findings, the order of preference for the three other factors ‘crisis assistance/support’, ‘childcare support’ and ‘alternative work arrangements’ varied among different demographic groups. Qualitative responses from employees showed employee interest in a wide variety of different work-life balance initiatives, the most prevalent being: social events, fitness and health initiatives, reduced working hours/weekend work, and flexible work options. In line with other studies, these findings support the notion that there is no on-size-fits-all policy appropriate for all companies or group of employees and that the provision of a wide variety of initiatives from which employees can choose during different stages in their life and career is ideal. Because work-life balance initiatives can be costly to implement, it is beneficial for employers to understand the needs of current employees and the employees which the organisation would like to attract.

The quantitative results regarding average hours worked per week showed 37 percent of all respondents work very long hours (50+ hours per week). The data also showed
that working hours vary significantly according to job role and location. For example, 58 percent of Project Managers, Construction Managers, Site Managers, Package Managers, and Project Leaders work very long hours whereas only 17 percent of Quantity Surveyors, Estimators, and Commercial Managers work very long hours. The qualitative open ended questions showed some employees expressed concern about long hours and weekend work in association with work-life balance. Even though the study did not examine employee level of work-life balance or conflict, the qualitative results suggest that there is some work-life conflict associated with working long hours and weekend work. This study’s findings lend support to the extant literature which show employees in the construction industry tend to work long hours and are concerned with long working hours and weekend work.

6.4 Limitations

This study’s sample population was made up of managerial and professional employees from one construction company only. Because of the sample type, the results are not generalisable across the entire construction industry as the company will have policies, procedures, and culture which differ from other companies in the industry and be of a different size to some construction companies.

The fact that some of the initiatives were already offered by the company while others were not may have influenced how the employees rated different initiatives. For example, if a wellness programme is already provided and most people find this useful it will obviously be rated highly. Whereas if employees are unfamiliar with how another initiative may be implemented, they may be less sure about how useful they would find the initiative and rate it lower.

The work-life balance initiative factors were used based on Lingard and Francis’ (2005) study and the Principal Component Analysis with varimax rotation that was used to define the factors in Lingard and Francis’ (2005) study was not carried out for the data gathered in the current study. Doing this would give more reliability to the claim that the factors have good internal consistency as was shown by Lingard.
and Francis’ (2005) study. This is beyond the scope of the current study, so Lingard and Francis’ (2005) factors were relied upon.

The questionnaire was administered electronically via email. The questionnaire could either be filled out by following the web link, by using the electronic pdf and returning by email, or by printing the pdf and returning by mail. All potential respondents had email access and hence it was reasonable to assume they all had the ability to answer the questionnaire, however respondents who spend more time at their computer could be more likely to answer the questionnaire which may have introduced an inherent bias in the results.

6.5 Future Study

From this research, a few areas of future study have been identified.

The literature shows that if initiatives are to be effective and taken up by employees, organisations must provide a supportive environment in combination with the provision of work-life balance initiatives (De Cieri et al., 2005). Further research could address whether or not employees feel the organisational culture, supervisors and managers support the initiatives provided by the company. A sub-research question could investigate whether employees are aware of all available initiatives and how they are used.

This study revealed working hours varied significantly depending on job role and location. Furthermore, Lingard and Francis’ (2004b) Australian research indicated site-based employees experience higher levels of work-life conflict than their counterparts in the head or regional offices. However, this study did not explore employee perceptions of their own work-life balance or conflict. The prevalence of work-life balance or conflict according to job role and location in New Zealand could be explored in future research.

The demographic questions showed that the large majority of employees were male, making up 90 percent of the workforce. Although the females made up a substantially lower proportion of the workforce, they were on average younger which indicates that more females may be entering the construction industry. This could be
investigated further throughout a variety of construction companies for various job roles within the construction industry.

6.6 Concluding remarks

The research questions posed in this study have been thoroughly addressed and the findings lend support to extant literature in the field regarding work-life balance initiatives and working hours. The results overall show employees are interested in a variety of work-life balance initiatives and do have concerns regarding different issues around work-life balance. In order to attract and maintain valuable employees for the benefit of not only employees themselves but organisations and the industry as a whole, it is important that the industry continually strives to: provide useful work-life balance initiatives, provide reasonable working hours for its employees, and develop supportive workplace cultures in line with such initiatives.

The findings are of significance because no previous similar research appears to exist in the New Zealand construction industry. The findings are also of significance because they add to the broader body of knowledge in relation to the contemporary, ongoing discussion in society about the importance of work-life balance.
7 REFERENCES


## APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

### Questionnaire: Employee Preferences for Work-Life Balance Initiatives

**Consent Form**

I understand this survey is for academic research purposes only.

I understand that taking part in this project is voluntary and that I may withdraw myself or any information I have provided from the project at any time without penalty.

I understand that the responses collected are anonymous and that my identity cannot be linked to my responses.

I understand that I may read the completed research report if I wish.

I also understand that the information I provide will be stored securely at Unitec for a period of 5 years. I agree that data I provide in this project may be used in the resulting research report and any subsequent associated publications.

**UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2009-337**

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 2 March 2009 to 31 December 2011. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 7248). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

1. I give my consent to be involved in this project.
   - [ ] Agree
Questionnaire: Employee Preferences for Work-Life Balance Initiatives

Section 1: Demographic Information

2. What job position do you hold? (Please tick the job position for which you are training.)
   - Project Manager/Construction Manager/Site Manager/Package Manager/Project Leader
   - Foreman/Supervisor
   - Site Administrator
   - Quantity Surveyor/Estimator/Commercial Manager
   - Engineering/Services/Coordination
   - Upper Management
   - Other

3. Where do you carry out most of your work? Note: If you work part of the day on site and part of the day in the site office, please tick the option where you spend the most time.
   - On-site
   - Site office
   - Head office

4. What is your gender?
   - Male
   - Female

5. How many years have you worked in construction?
   - 0-9
   - 10-19
   - 20-29
   - 30 years +

6. What type of working arrangement do you have?
   - Full-time work
   - Part-time work
   - Contract work
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7. How many hours do you work in a typical work week?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- 0-29 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 30-39 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 40-49 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 50-59 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 60 hours +</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8. What is your age?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- 16-20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 20-30 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 30-49 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 50-59 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 60 years +</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Questionnaire: Employee Preferences for Work-Life Balance Initiatives

**Section 2: Usefulness of work-life balance initiatives**

Please answer ALL parts of question 10 even if you would not use the initiative.

Please ignore whether the initiatives are currently provided or not.

9. **How useful would you consider the following work-life balance initiatives to be? Please answer according to how useful the initiative would be to you personally.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>not at all useful</th>
<th>of limited use</th>
<th>moderately useful</th>
<th>useful</th>
<th>very useful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offering a fitness programme e.g. discounted gym memberships</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing a wellness programme i.e. health checks, guest speakers, fitness challenges</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reimbursing the costs of work related courses and further study</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing for flexible work hours e.g. starting and finishing half an hour earlier or later</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering part-time work options e.g. approximately 25hrs/week</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing job sharing where one job is split between 2 people working fewer hours</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing flexibility in work location e.g. working from home/telecommuting</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing an information and referral service to assist with care of elderly parents</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing a legal information service</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering temporary part-time work options during a family crisis</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing for special family leave e.g. to care for a sick dependent</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing an employee assistance programme for employees with family problems</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring people take their annual leave regularly</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing child care facilities</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering care on short notice for a child or other dependents</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing assistance with minor care costs</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing care for children during school holidays</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering extended parental leave</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing an information and referral service to assist with care of dependent children</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing scholarships for employees' children</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. Are there any additional work-life balance initiatives you think would be useful?

11. If you wish to further comment on the topic or any of the above issues, please do so here.
APPENDIX B: EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Hi,

I am a QS cadet undertaking an Industry Research Project to complete my final year of the Bachelor of Construction course at Unitec. Your response to a survey on work-life balance initiatives which will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete would be greatly appreciated and will contribute to making this a valid research project.

You can complete the survey either online through accessing the link http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/EmployeePreferencesQuestionnaire or by printing out the attached PDF version and returning it to me via post or internal mail (address below).

The responses generated through both options are completely anonymous and used for academic research purposes only.

The title of the research project is ‘Employees’ Preferences for Work-Life Balance Initiatives within a Large New Zealand Construction Company’. The research replicates a similar study undertaken in Australia and aims to rank the types of initiatives according to how useful employees consider them to be and compare the results to those found in the Australian construction industry.

Thank you for your time.

Kind regards,

Emily Morrison
APPENDIX C: COMPANY EMAIL ENDORSEMENT

Dear All

Emily Morrison is a QS cadet carrying out an Industry Research Project to complete her Bachelor of Construction at Unitec.

She will be sending out an anonymous questionnaire which will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. We support her in this endeavour and have given her permission to survey the professional and managerial staff within this company.

The research topic is ‘Employees’ Preferences for Work-Life Balance Initiatives within a Large New Zealand Construction Company’. The questionnaire is based on a previous Australian study and aims to rank employees’ preferences for various initiatives and compare these to the results found in the Australian construction industry.

The questionnaire and results of the research are completely anonymous and for research purposes only.

Please take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire if possible.

Regards,

General Manager
APPENDIX D: CLOSING DATE REMINDER EMAIL

Hi,

Thank you to all of you who have filled out the Industry Research Project Questionnaire. I really appreciate all of the responses and interest! Once compiled, I’ll make the results available. The survey will be closing the end of the day tomorrow (Thursday) for those of you who would still like to fill it out.

If you have internet access please use the following link http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/EmployeePreferencesQuestionnaire, otherwise you can print out the attached pdf and return via internal mail or post to the address below.

Thanks again,

Emily Morrison
APPENDIX E: LINGARD & FRANCIS’ (2005) STUDY
The decline of the ‘traditional’ family: work-life benefits as a means of promoting a diverse workforce in the construction industry of Australia

HELEN LINGARD1* and VALERIE FRANCIS2

1School of Construction Management and Property, Queensland University of Technology, Australia
2Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, The University of Melbourne, Australia

Received 13 December 2004; accepted 6 June 2005

The ‘traditional’ managerial career model was based upon a clear division of labour. Typically, women stayed at home to raise children and manage household work while men acted as primary breadwinners. In this arrangement, relocation, long and inflexible hours of work and frequent travel were not only possible but were a prerequisite for advancement. However, since the 1950s, dramatic changes to family structures and workforce composition have occurred. In the twenty-first century the majority of women, including those who may be considered in the child-bearing and early child-rearing age group, are in paid employment. There has also been an increase in the number of lone parents in the workforce. There is evidence of a corresponding change in employees’ expectations, with both men and women placing greater value on both work and family involvement. Given these changes, it can no longer be assumed that employees are ‘free’ to devote all their energy to their work. Nor can it be assumed that there is a clear separation between employees’ work and personal lives. The construction industry has a culture of long hours and weekend work, and construction employees struggle to achieve a balance between their work and personal lives. This paper suggests that, in order to attract and retain a talented workforce, construction organizations will increasingly have to cater for the diverse needs of employees with regard to work-life balance. Furthermore, it is likely that employees’ needs will vary according to their gender, age and stage of family development. A ‘one size fits all’ approach to managing work-life balance is unlikely to suffice. This paper presents the results of an empirical investigation of project-based professional and managerial employees’ preferences for work-life balance initiatives in Australian private and public sector construction organizations. Preferences were found to differ significantly by employee family structure and age. The small number of female respondents did not warrant statistical comparisons by gender. However, the profile of female respondents suggests that women with dependent children are seriously under-represented in project-based positions within the participating organizations. Finally, the implications for managing a diverse workforce are discussed.

Keywords: Work-life benefits, age, gender, family structure, diversity

Introduction

Changing family roles and workforce demographics

The roles and expectations of men and women have changed significantly over the past 60 years. More Australian women than ever before are in the workforce reflecting rising educational levels, changing societal attitudes and declining birth rates. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) report that women’s overall participation in the paid workforce in Australia has risen from 43.7 per cent in 1978 to 55.5 per cent in 2004 (ABS, 2004a). As a consequence of the changing workforce profile, the number of dual-income couples overall has increased. In 57.5 per cent of Australian two-parent families (with children under 15) both parents were in full-time paid employment in 2003 (ABS, 2004b).

With the increasing acceptance of gender equity, family is being seen more as a joint responsibility, both from a financial and nurturing perspective. There has
been a substantial shift in the expectation of fathers’ involvement in parenting. In an Australian study by Russell et al. (as cited in Russell and Bowman, 2000), 68 per cent of fathers reported they did not spend as much time with their children as they would like, with 57 per cent acknowledging that work-related factors were the major contributors to this problem.

The recent change from institutional aged care to home- and community-based care means that responsibility for caring for elderly relatives now rests more heavily with family members. With Australia’s ageing population and increasing life expectancy, the number of workers with filial responsibilities is likely to rise. In 1998, 58 per cent of Australians with dependent care responsibilities took time off to meet family responsibilities. The average duration of this absence was 9.4 days in a 12-month period (Glezer and Wolcott, 2000). Furthermore, it appears that both men and women take time off work on an almost equal basis for this purpose (ABS, 1999b).

The changing workforce has forced changes to work practices to accommodate those with family responsibilities, most notably for taking time off work. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reported that, during 1998, 58 per cent of Australians with dependent care responsibilities took time off to meet family responsibilities. The average duration of this absence was 9.4 days in a 12-month period (Glezer and Wolcott, 2000). Furthermore, it appears that both men and women take time off work on an almost equal basis for this purpose (ABS, 1999b).

Changing expectations regarding work-life balance

Changing family structures have led to changed expectations regarding work-life balance. For example, a survey of Australian men under 35 years of age with young children and partners in the workforce reported that they were feeling more stress and are keen to change the corporate world to enable them to better balance work-life issues (Russell and Bowman, 2000). These findings are consistent with those of Loughlin and Barling (2001), who report that the new generation of younger workers, both male and female, is not motivated by the same rewards as their parents’ generation. Instead they place greater value on ‘non-standard’ work models that enable them to enjoy a more satisfactory work-life balance.

Becker and Moen (1999) describe how dual-earner couples make a conscious decision to ‘scale back’ work commitments to balance work and family. This scaling back is related to the life-course with many workers, both male and female, consciously placing limits on work commitments following the birth of a child. In Australia, there is also a growing trend for men to reduce their time commitments to work in order to take more responsibility in the home (The Age, 2003). Further it appears that highly educated and professional employees proactively plan to blend work and family and that this influences their employment choices. For example, Cinamon and Rich (2002) report that employees who place high importance on both work and family will seek a work environment in which substantial resources are invested in supporting work-family role combinations (e.g. by adopting work-life balance policies). Similarly, Konrad (2003) reports that professionals and managers who expect to bear considerable domestic responsibilities express a preference for jobs that offer shorter, flexible work hours and a less demanding work environment. While this held true for both male and female respondents, the effect was greater among women, who traditionally invest more hours in household labour than men. However, Konrad (2003) also reports that employees who preferred flexibility to accommodate family circumstances did not reduce their desire for a rewarding career and intrinsically rewarding work. Thus organizations wishing to attract employees with family responsibilities face the challenge of finding ways to provide flexibility without denying career rewards to employees. In this context, non-traditional management approaches are required to attract, retain and motivate employees.

The Australian construction industry

The Australian construction industry is characterized by traditional work patterns. There is a strong culture of long hours and weekend work, especially among site-based employees. During peak times site-based employees are often required to perform significant amounts of unpaid overtime, often with little warning. Unsurprisingly, site-based employees are reported to suffer from significantly higher levels of work-to-family conflict and emotional exhaustion (burnout) than office-based counterparts in the construction industry (Lingard and Francis, 2004). The traditional work patterns prevalent in the construction industry are based on gendered assumptions about the nature of work and the ever-availability of employees. Work cultures that equate long hours spent at work with employee commitment assume a division of labour in which men’s time is devoted to work while women’s time is devoted to managing the home and family, a division which frees male employees to be available to respond to organizational demands at all times (Lawrence and Corwin, 2003). However, the persistence of traditional work patterns in the construction
industry, discussed above, is at odds with the enormous social changes that have occurred since the 1950s, most notably the decline of the traditional family, the dramatic changes to the demographic profile of the workforce and the emergence of a new generation of employees with expectations of achieving a satisfactory balance between work and family, as discussed above.

It has been argued that the industry’s failure to accommodate the family needs of employees has acted as a barrier to women’s entry into the construction industry (Fielden et al., 2000). While Australian women’s participation rates in construction and engineering have risen, currently only 7.9 per cent of all managers and professionals in the industry are female (ABS, 2003). The need to diversify the Australian construction workforce has been acknowledged and many direct forms of discrimination have been eradicated, but the industry remains heavily male-dominated. Adherence to inflexible, traditional employment practices is likely to be one reason for this failure (Fielden et al., 2000). It is probable that these traditional work patterns act as an indirect form of discrimination for workers with family responsibilities. A recent survey by the Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers (APESMA) supports this contention. The survey revealed that only 24 per cent of female engineers and 21 per cent of female architects were mothers. Women in these professions were also less likely to work part time and worked more hours a week above the 38-hour standard than other professionals. According to APESMA, many female professionals in engineering and architecture are forced to choose between career and family, with many leaving their professions in order to bear children (The Age, 2004). Other potential employees, both male and female, who foresee family responsibilities in the future may choose alternative careers to those in the construction industry. We suggest that if the construction industry is to attract and retain a diverse workforce, construction organizations must accommodate the work-life balance expectations of both women and men.

Work-life benefits

Work-life benefits are formal organizational initiatives designed to prevent or reduce conflict between employees’ work and personal lives. Secret (2000) classifies work-life benefits into four categories:

- Alternative work arrangements;
- Leave time policies;
- Childcare services; and
- Mental health and wellness services.

Alternative work arrangements include the modification of daily start and stop times, compressed work weeks, part-time work, job-sharing and tele-commuting on a regular basis. Leave time policies include mandated maternity and paternity leave entitlements and informal arrangements for a few hours or days off with or without pay but available on an ad hoc basis. Childcare services include on-site childcare facilities, subsidization of childcare costs, pre-tax credits for childcare assistance or information referral services for dependant care and resources. Mental health and wellness services include employee assistance programmes (EAPs), stress management workshops and seminars on family-related matters.

Research indicates that the availability of work-life benefits does alleviate the conflict employees experience between work and personal life (Warren and Johnson, 1995; VanRijswijk et al., 2004) and facilitates a better balance between employees’ work and personal lives (Tausig and Fenwick 2001; Madsen 2003). Work-life benefits are also reported to improve organizations’ competitiveness by increasing their ability to attract employees (Casper and Buffardi, 2004), inducing employees to exercise discretionary effort in performing their work (Konrad and Mangel, 2000) and helping employees to be more productive (Eaton, 2003). Further, Arthur (2003) reports a positive relationship between the announcement of organizational work-life benefit initiatives and shareholder returns, indicating that investors view family-friendly firms more favourably.

However, there is a lack of consensus about whether the positive effect of work-life benefits is universal (i.e. experienced by all employees, irrespective of their individual characteristics or circumstances) or whether the effect of work-life benefits differs for particular sub-populations of employees. Some research suggests demographic differences exist. For example, McKeen and Burke (1994) explored the extent to which managerial women valued different types of work-life benefits and found significant differences according to age and parental status. Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) report that, in a homogeneous sample of managers and professionals, the work-life benefits of family-care and flexibility were used by employees possessing different demographic characteristics. Konrad and Mangel (2000) argue that the productivity impact of work-life benefits will be contingent upon the types of workers employed by a firm.

Other research suggests that work-life benefits have a positive effect upon employee attitudes irrespective of whether employees are likely to use them or not. For example, Grover and Crooker (1995) directly assessed the impact of childcare and flexibility policies on the organizational commitment of parents and non-parents. They report that employees who had access to flexible work hours had greater affective
commitment, irrespective of whether they were parents or non-parents. However, a policy of providing assistance with the costs of childcare was not associated with higher commitment among either group. Similarly, Casper and Buffardi (2004) report that the work-life benefits of flexibility and dependant care assistance predicted job pursuit intentions irrespective of whether potential employees were likely to use these benefits.

Still other research indicates that the relationship between work-life balance benefits and employees’ work-related attitudes differs according to both employee characteristics and the type of work-life benefit in question. For example, Roehling et al. (2001) explored the effect of gender, age and stage of family development upon the extent to which work-life balance benefits contribute to employee loyalty to their organization. They report flexible time policies are associated with increased loyalty for men and women at all life stages but that the impact of childcare policies on employees’ loyalty varied by employees’ gender and age of youngest child.

Research objectives

Despite the potential advantages to be gained from the implementation of work-life benefits, some benefits may be costly to implement. It is therefore imperative that organizations consider the likely outcomes before deciding to provide work-life benefits. Knowledge about employees’ preferences for work-life benefits can assist employers and human resource managers to develop policies and practices that are perceived to be of benefit to important sub-populations of existing or potential employees.

The objective of this study was to identify the preferences of a sample of Australian technical, managerial and professional construction employees, for a range of different work-life benefits. We also tested for significant differences between the preferences of key groups of employees who differ by various demographic characteristics. The rationale for considering these characteristics is briefly presented below.

Relevant employee characteristics

Family development theory holds that people’s norms and expectations change as they progress through the stages of family life. White (1999) suggests that stages of family life interact with stages of other social institutions, including work, in complex ways. He suggests that family life must be synchronized with educational and work careers and that a lack of synchronicity gives rise to strain and conflict. Empirical research indicates that the importance attached to one’s social roles (e.g. as employee or parent) has been found to affect the nature of the relationship between work-family conflict and outcome variables such as job satisfaction and psychological well-being (Noor, 2004). Roehling et al. (2001) suggest that life stage is a function of both biological age and family configuration. It is likely that life stage will have a significant impact upon employees’ experiences at the work-family interface. In particular, entering a partnership (or marriage) and becoming a parent are likely to be two transitions that can affect one’s obligations to family and work and shape the prominence of a person’s role as worker and family member. For example, Abroms and Goldscheider (2002) report that the relationship status of women (e.g. whether they are single, in a de facto relationship or married) has an impact upon the number of hours they spend in paid work. Costigan et al. (2003) suggest that the birth of a child is an important transitional period, significantly increasing family workload and requiring couples to make significant adjustments to family role arrangements. The stressful impact of the transition to parenthood is likely to be increased for employees in dual-earner couples in which both partners need to balance the demands of work with the new roles and responsibilities of being a parent.

Employees’ sex is also likely to impact upon preferences for and use of work-life benefits. It is well documented that working women are more influenced by experiences in non-work domains than men. Hothschild (1989) writes of working women performing a ‘second shift’ when they return home from paid work. Empirical research shows that, on average, women demonstrate a slightly higher use of work-life balance benefits than men (Thompson et al., 1999; Allen, 2001). This may be because, in most Western industrialized societies, women still perform the largest share of care-giving and household tasks (Dikkers et al., 2004).

Given these differences, the extent to which employees respond favourably to organizational work-life benefits could depend, to some degree, on their sex, age and family circumstances. Consequently, Bardoel et al. (1999) suggest that, if work-life benefits are to be effectively used to attract and retain a diverse workforce, these benefits must be strategically designed to meet the needs of key constituent employee groups.

Research methods

Survey administration

The data were collected from employees of one public and one private sector organization in Queensland, Australia. The public sector organization is involved in
the construction of large infrastructure projects and the private sector construction company is involved in both civil engineering and building projects throughout the state of Queensland. All project-based professional or managerial staff of both organizations were invited to participate in the study.

The majority of the data was collected via a World Wide Web-based survey. Paper-based surveys were made available on the website (downloadable pdf version) to allow respondents who were not comfortable completing the survey online to participate in the study. The website contained information about the study as well as privacy information. The web-based delivery of the survey was deemed appropriate for the managerial/professional employees in the sample (Dillman, 2000).

A letter from senior management explaining the purpose of the survey and assuring the confidentiality and anonymity of responses invited professional and managerial employees to complete the questionnaire.

The questionnaire design

Demographic information collected from respondents included:

- year of birth;
- age;
- gender;
- number of years worked in the construction industry;
- number of years worked for current employer;
- job position;
- location of the majority of work time; and
- description of family and household, including dependent children (those under the age of 18 years).

The utility of work-life benefits was assessed using a 21-item composite scale. Participants were asked to indicate their preferences for benefits, ignoring the likelihood of future usage. Responses were scored on a five-point Likert-style scale, where 1 = not at all useful; 2 = of limited use; 3 = moderately useful; 4 = useful; and 5 = very useful. The work-life benefit items were drawn from a wide variety of sources (Biggs, 1998; Scheibl and Dex, 1998; Moen et al., 1999; Grandey, 2001; Hill et al., 2001; Saltzstein et al., 2001; Thornwaite, 2002).

Data analysis

Scores for the composite work-life benefit scale were analysed using Principal Components Analysis with varimax rotation. Owing to the clarity of the factors, items loading on these factors were grouped and mean scores calculated for each factor. These mean scores were then used in further analyses of employees’ preferences for work-life balance initiatives. One-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to compare the mean scores for the benefit factors between employees who differed by age and family structure.

Results

Two hundred and two complete and useable questionnaires were returned. Of the total responses, 63 (31.2 per cent) were from the private sector and 139 (68.8 per cent) were from the public sector. This represents a response rate of approximately 60 per cent from the private sector organization and 28 per cent from the public sector organization. Due to the web-based survey administration, precise response rates are unable to be calculated.

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the sample. The mean age of the sample was 39.8 years (SD = 10.7) ranging from 22 to 67 years. The average age of public sector employees was 40.2 years (SD = 10.8) and private sector employees was 39.0 years (SD = 10.5). Of the 202 respondents, 178 (88.1 per cent) were male and 24 (11.9 per cent) were female. In both organizations, the age of the female cohort was substantially younger than that of the male cohort. The average age of the male respondents was 41.0 years (SD = 10.5) and female respondents was 31.1 years (SD = 7.6).

Work-life benefit factors

The principal components analysis yielded a four factor solution, explaining 61 per cent of total variance. Table 2 shows the item loadings for each factor. After careful consideration of the items loading on each factor, the factors were labelled: childcare support; alternative work arrangements; crisis assistance/support; and wellness and personal development. There was relatively little double-loading of items, with the exception of three items. These items related to extended parental leave after the birth or adoption of a child; offering temporary part-time work options during family crises; and providing more flexible work hours. Despite this double-loading, the alpha coefficients for childcare support, alternative work arrangements, crisis assistance/support and wellness and personal development were .93, .77, .79 and .87 respectively. These coefficients meet the requirement of being greater than .70 and indicate that the factor sub-scales possess good internal consistency reliability.
Overall preference scores

The sample mean values for each of the work-life benefit factors are shown in Table 3. The highest mean preference score was reported for wellness and personal development. \((M=3.39, SD=.919)\). The lowest mean preference score was reported for childcare support \((M=1.95, SD=1.116)\). There was a moderate expression of preference for alternative work arrangements \((M=2.41, SD=.59)\) and crisis assistance/support \((M=2.51, SD=.932)\).

Comparisons by age

Figure 1 and Table 4 show the mean preference scores for each of the work-life benefit factors by respondents’ age. Employees in the 40–49 year age group expressed the strongest preference for alternative work arrangements. Employees in the 60+ year age cohort expressed the lowest preference for alternative work arrangements. However, the one-way ANOVA indicated that the differences in mean preference scores for alternative work arrangements between employees in different age cohorts was not statistically significant.

The highest preference for crisis support was among employees in the 50–59 year age cohort. Employees in the 60+ age cohort expressed the lowest preference for crisis support initiatives. A one-way ANOVA indicated that the differences in mean preference scores for crisis assistance/support initiatives between employees in different age cohorts was significant \((F=2.983, p=.020)\).

The highest expressed preference for wellness and personal development initiatives was among employees in the 20–29 year age cohort. Preferences for wellness and personal development initiatives were the lowest in employees in the 60+ year age cohort. A one-way ANOVA indicated that the differences in mean preference scores for wellness and personal development initiatives between employees in different age cohorts was statistically significant \((F=3.136, p=.016)\).
Comparisons by family structure

Figure 2 and Table 5 show the mean preference scores for each of the work-life benefit factors by respondents’ self-reported family structure. Employees who are partnered with dependent children expressed the strongest preference for childcare support initiatives. Employees who are single or partnered without dependent children expressed the lowest preference for childcare support initiatives. A one-way ANOVA indicated that the difference in mean preference scores for childcare support initiatives between employees in different family structures was highly significant (F=25.255, p=.000).

Employees in all family structures indicated that alternative work arrangements would be of some use to them and a one-way analysis of variance confirmed no significant differences exist. Employees who are partnered with dependent children expressed slightly higher preference for crisis assistance/support initiatives. However, the one-way ANOVA revealed no significant differences between the mean preference scores of employees in different family structures for crisis assistance/support initiatives.

Both partnered employees with children and single parents expressed a relatively low preference for wellness and personal development initiatives. Single employees expressed the strongest preference for wellness and personal development initiatives. Employees who are partnered without children also expressed a relatively strong preference for wellness and personal development.

Table 2  Factor analysis for work-life benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 1 Childcare support</th>
<th>Factor 2 Alternative work arrangements</th>
<th>Factor 3 Crisis assistance/support</th>
<th>Factor 4 Wellness and personal development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing child care facilities.</td>
<td>.893</td>
<td>Providing emergency care for a child or other dependants.</td>
<td>.889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering extended parental leave after the birth or adoption of a child.</td>
<td>.557</td>
<td>Providing scholarships for employees' children</td>
<td>.520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing flexibility in work location (working from home/telecommuting).</td>
<td>.549</td>
<td>Providing an information and referral service to assist with care of aged parents.</td>
<td>.765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing for special family leave e.g. to care for a sick dependant.</td>
<td>.615</td>
<td>Providing an employee assistance programme for employees with family problems.</td>
<td>.599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing a wellness programme.</td>
<td>.658</td>
<td>Reimbursing the costs of courses and further study.</td>
<td>.646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalues</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of variance</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: Boxes denote factors.
development initiatives. However, a one-way ANOVA revealed that the differences between the mean preference scores of employees in different family structures for wellness and personal development initiatives were not statistically significant.

Comparisons by gender

Figure 3 shows the mean preference scores for each of the work-life benefit factors by respondents’ gender.

Table 3 Work-life benefit preferences mean scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean value</th>
<th>Std deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Childcare support</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>1.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative work arrangements</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>1.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis assistance/support</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>0.932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellness and personal development</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>0.919</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This shows that men expressed a slightly higher preference for childcare support benefits than women, while women expressed a stronger preference for wellness and personal development initiatives and alternative work arrangements. Owing to the much smaller number of female respondents than male respondents, statistical comparisons of means were not warranted.

These results must be considered in the context of dramatic differences in the family structures of the men and women in our sample. Table 6 shows that 83 men (46.6 per cent) reported being partnered with dependent children and six men (3.4 per cent) indicated they were single fathers. In contrast, only two women (8.3 per cent) reported being partnered with dependent children and there were no single mothers. Compared with men, a much larger proportion of female respondents reported themselves to be partnered without children or single.

Table 4 Work-life benefit preferences mean scores for different age cohorts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20–29 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare support</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative work arrangements</td>
<td>2.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis assistance/support</td>
<td>2.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellness and personal development</td>
<td>3.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

Work-life benefit categories

The principal components analysis revealed that some of the benefit items included in the survey loaded on more than one factor. While this was not a serious problem because the factors possessed good internal consistency reliability, the double-loading does suggest that some overlap between work-life benefit categories exists. In particular, there appears to be some conceptual link between childcare support, alternative work arrangements and crisis assistance/support. It is possible that these types of work-life benefit are mutually supportive, offering different ways in which employees can simultaneously satisfy their work and personal life expectations. Future research should explore these linkages.

Work-life benefit preferences

Previous research has linked work-life benefits with job pursuit intentions, organizational commitment, employee loyalty and productivity and share price, suggesting that there is a lot to be gained by organizations that implement work-life benefits. However, our results reveal that preferences for work-life benefits vary considerably between different groups of professional and managerial employees in our sample. These results suggest that there is no ‘one size fits all’ solution to work-life balance in the construction industry. No single work-life benefit is likely to meet the needs of all employees. Thus workforce profiling is probably a useful means to identify the most beneficial and highly valued initiatives to implement. It seems probable that a ‘cafeteria style’ range of benefits might need to be offered from which employees can design the salary and benefit packages that best suit their needs at a particular life stage. The key is likely to be in affording employees a sense of flexibility and control over their work arrangements. Further, our results suggest that, as employees progress through the stages of family life, their requirements may change, and regular review of work-life benefit availability may need to be undertaken.

Among respondents to our survey, male respondents expressed a stronger preference for childcare support policies than female respondents. This finding was somewhat unexpected and appears to contrary to the findings of previous research showing that female employees use organizationally provided childcare arrangements more frequently than male employees (Dikkers et al., 2004). One possible reason for this finding is that, unlike other work-life benefits, not all employees would be eligible to use childcare support. Indeed, these benefits are likely to only be of use to employees who are parents of dependent children. Female respondents with dependent children were seriously under-represented among respondents to our survey. The reasons for this are not clear; however, this may indicate that existing work-life benefits are insufficient to attract or retain working mothers, even acting as a subtle source of discrimination. The
under-representation of women in general, and particularly mothers, is a serious concern. Future research should explore the role of various work-life benefits in attracting and retaining women in all age groups and stages of family development.

Our survey was limited in that we were only able to ascertain the work-life benefit preferences of existing employees. It is also important for organizations to consider benefits that would appeal to groups of employees they wish to target for recruitment. The expectations of these people may not be the same as those of existing employees, especially in an industry in which considerable segregation by gender still exists. Careful planning of work-life benefits can be used to target employees from currently under-represented demographic groups and is likely to play an important role in the attraction, retention and motivation of a diverse workforce.

Unlike childcare support, wellness and personal development and alternative work arrangements can be used by all employees. Among respondents in our study, these work-life benefit types were favoured similarly by respondents irrespective of age and family structure. This is consistent with research undertaken by Secret (2000), who explored the likelihood that a sample of men and women would use different types of work-life benefits. She reports that employees with children were no more likely to use some work-life benefits than employees without children and concludes that work-life benefits are valued by all employees, including those who are child-free. Similarly, Roehling et al. (2001) report that employees value flexible work arrangements irrespective of gender or life stage. The implication of our finding is that work-life benefits addressing wellness and personal development and alternative work arrangements can be useful to construction industry employers who are concerned about the equitable provision of benefits to employees with and without dependent children.

**Work-life benefits and strategic human resource management**

Given the labour shortage facing Australia and the increasing scarcity of key personnel in the labour market, the implementation of work-life benefits is likely to become a greater necessity for strategic human resource management. Previous research suggests that organizations that operate in tight labour markets are more likely to adopt work-life benefits as a means of reducing the negative consequences of work-family conflict and attract and retain high quality employees (Poelmans et al., 2003). In the future, construction firms will experience a greater need to attract employees from currently under-represented segments of the population. Work-life benefits that are linked to job pursuit intentions could play a key role in facilitating this attraction (Casper and Buffardi, 2004). Further, we suggest that adopting work-life benefits would also enhance the competitiveness of construction organizations by eliciting high levels of commitment and performance from their existing employees and reducing costly turnover. Institutional theorists assert that, in industries in which the provision of work-life benefits is not already widespread, proactive organizations that offer benefits gain competitive advantage over those that do not offer work-life benefits (Ingram and Simons, 1995). Thus, in the construction industry, progressive family-friendly firms are likely to be rewarded with increased organizational effectiveness.

**Organizational issues impeding take-up of benefits**

However, research also strongly indicates that the mere provision of such benefits is insufficient. There is evidence that, even when provided, work-life benefits are often not utilized by employees. The workplace social context and the perceived appropriateness of utilization are reported to have a significant impact upon the extent to which work-life benefits are used (Blair-Loy and Wharton, 2002; Kirby and Krone, 2002). It is likely that many of the desirable outcomes associated with work-life benefits will not be realized unless employees do not feel free to utilize them. For example, Eaton (2003) reports that work-life benefits are only related to organizational commitment to the extent that these benefits are perceived to be useable.
Usability issues apply to all employees, although particular problems are apparent for employees who are male and/or those who perform a managerial role (Barham et al., 2001).

Issues of organizational culture have been identified as critical determinants of work-life benefit utilization. In particular, employees’ perceptions about the career consequences associated with using benefits, normative expectations about appropriate amounts of time spent at work and managerial support for employees’ work-life balance are likely to play a role. Although work-life benefit programmes create new ways of working, organizational cultures may still reward old ways of working with the result that employees who use work-life benefits are negatively affected (Thompson et al., 1999; Wayne and Cordeiro, 2003).

Empirical research demonstrates that perceptions of a supportive work environment are significantly related to employees’ attachment to their organization above and beyond the availability of work-life benefits (Thompson et al., 1999; Allen, 2001). Research also shows that expectations concerning work outcomes predict the use of work-life benefits (Butler et al., 2003). These studies all suggest that to derive maximum benefit from work-life benefits, organizations need to allay employees’ concerns that use of benefits will lead to negative consequences.

Behson (2002) suggests that, in many instances, rather than take advantage of formal organizationally provided work-life benefits, employees cope with work-life balance issues by making informal adjustments to their work arrangements. These adjustments are not proscribed or mandated by the company but are often sanctioned at a local level by the employee’s immediate supervisor or manager. In a direct comparison of formal work-life benefits versus informal support, Behson (in press) reports that informal support predicted the largest portion (95 per cent) of variance in work-to-family conflict, job satisfaction, turnover intention and absenteeism. Thus the empirical evidence overwhelmingly supports the relative importance of informal work-life supports in addition to the provision of formal work-life benefits. The highly decentralized nature of construction operations creates the possibility that informal policies are experienced differently within a single construction organization. Negative responses from supervisors or managers at a local or project level could even outweigh the positive effects of benefit provision at the organizational level. In this context, it is particularly important that managers and supervisors at all levels support employees’ work-life balance and fully understand the organizational benefits associated with the provision of work-life balance policies and programmes.

Conclusions

Our study has demonstrated that distinct sub-populations of employees differ in terms of their preferences for work-life benefits. In particular, employees’ preferences differ according to their age and stage of family development. In the context of changing workforce demographics and employee expectations about work-life balance, construction organizations should consider the implementation of work-life benefits as a strategy to attract, motivate and retain a diverse workforce. Particular attention may need to be paid to policies and benefits attractive to working mothers. It is noteworthy that one Australian contractor recently introduced a policy of offering paid maternity leave, not a legal entitlement in Australia, in an attempt to attract female employees. Our results indicate that no ‘one size fits all’ solution to employees’ work-life balance exists. Rather, to maintain equity, benefits that can be used by men and women in a diverse range of family structures and life stages should be offered.

Future research

The study was limited in that its focus was solely on the preferences of technical, professional and managerial employees in the Australian construction industry. The findings must therefore be understood in the context of the Australian social, legal and economic environment. It is likely that broader social, legal and economic variables will impact upon employees’ work-life balance experiences and expectations and we therefore recommend that future research replicate our study in other countries.

A limitation of this study was that it relied upon respondents’ reports of their preferences for different work-life benefits. No attempt was made to ascertain whether such policies would be used and, if so, what impact the use of work-life benefits would have. Future research needs to evaluate the effect of different types of work-life benefit on sub-populations of employees. For example, what work-life balance policies bring about a reduction in work-family conflict, an increase in employee loyalty or a reduction in absenteeism and/or turnover? In order to achieve this, experimental research is required. The extent to which the employee characteristics of gender and life stage moderate the relationship between benefit availability and the outcomes listed above should also be investigated. An experiment of this type would provide human resource managers with a better understanding of appropriate and effective management strategies for a diverse workforce.
Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank the Construction Industry Institute (Australia) for generously funding this research.

References


Fallon, B. and Mallamace, J. (2000) The need for and the availability of family friendly programs does not mean they will be used, personal communication to principal authors.


