

## ■ Work-life balance really does count

New research shows that work-life balance is a key factor in attracting and retaining staff – even more important than salary.

Australians have the dubious honour of working the longest hours of any OECD country, with 20 to 25 per cent of people working more than 50 hours each week. Yet research by productivity consultancy Converge International shows that 47 per cent of workers rate work-life balance as very important and another 32 per cent see it as important.

Converge International's CEO Dr Lindsay McMillan says an imbalance between work and life can result in declining quality of life, loss of community, erosion of relationships and resentment.

"If workplaces are to avoid harvesting this kind of negative atmosphere, they really need to take serious consideration of these trends and begin concerning themselves with negotiating and transforming the current pattern of 'work-life collision' into one of 'work-life balance'," he warns.

According to McMillan, introducing work-life balance strategies is particularly important in attracting and retaining Gen X and Y employees. "As a generalisation, Gen X and Y don't have the same work ethic that their parents had. Work is only one part of their lifestyles and younger Australians are saying that work will not be the most important thing for them in the future."

He adds: "Directors need to recognise that the nature of work has morphed into life. We no longer have the distinct eight hours of work and then play."

Before implementing work-life balance strategies, McMillan says directors need to ask what culture they want to convey to the organisation. "It's not enough to just spend the time and effort required to research appropriate work-life balance strategies, there needs to be a cultural shift within the organisation. Many workplaces fear such practices interrupt the day-to-day running of a business and that employees who take advantage of work-life balance strategies are lacking in commitment," he says.

"For this reason, senior leaders in a business need to lead by example and there needs to be a champion of the cause. This shows all employees that they can switch over to work-life balance initiatives without risking their career progression."

Indeed, McMillan says work-life balance programs can come with stigmas attached. "For example, some men may be viewed as less committed to the company because they embrace a work-life balance program."