NEWS LESSON

When Time Counts for More Than Salary



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. How closely do people's stated priorities match the choices they actually make?
2. Why might a worker with savings and a worker without them answer a survey about jobs differently?
3. Can you remember a time when what you said you wanted and what you chose were not the same?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**conventional**	☐	A	the chances of success or progress in the future
2	**prospects**	☐	B	research done by collecting information directly from people
3	**fieldwork**	☐	C	the annoyance that comes from small, repeated problems
4	**distinction**	☐	D	a clear difference between two things
5	**juggling**	☐	E	trying to manage several tasks at the same time
6	**friction**	☐	F	a heavy duty or worry that someone has to carry
7	**burden**	☐	G	something that makes a situation harder to deal with
8	**complication**	☐	H	following what is usual or traditional

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

A global survey ranks work-life balance above pay as a reason to leave a job, but stated priorities are not the same as real choices.

1 Suppose you were offered two positions with similar responsibilities and prospects. One came with a substantial salary increase, but demanded a rigid schedule and a lengthy commute. The other offered less money, yet gave you genuine control over your working hours and location. For years, conventional career advice might have encouraged you to follow the money. Recent research suggests that the calculation is becoming more complicated, as workers weigh up the hidden costs of their working lives.

2 On 19 November 2026, the recruitment group Adecco released its Global Workforce of the Future report, based on an online survey of 40,500 employees in 36 countries and 21 industries. The fieldwork took place in June and July. For the first time in the seven-year history of the annual research, work-life balance emerged ahead of salary as the leading reason respondents would consider leaving their employer. The distinction matters: the survey records people's stated priorities, not proof that they would necessarily reject higher pay when faced with a real offer.

3 Nevertheless, the result speaks to a broader reassessment of work. A long commute can quietly consume hours that never appear on a payslip. Fixed schedules can be particularly punishing for parents, carers and anyone juggling education or medical appointments. By contrast, having some say over when and where work gets done can reduce daily friction and create space for relationships, rest and personal interests. For many employees, flexibility is less about enjoying an occasional afternoon off than about making an ordinary week sustainable.

4 That freedom, however, is distributed unevenly. People who work in hospitals, shops, factories or restaurants cannot simply relocate their duties to a kitchen table. Even among office workers, coordination and face-to-face contact can be valuable. Employers have to strike a balance between autonomy and operational needs, while avoiding a two-tier culture in which some colleagues enjoy considerable freedom and others are left carrying the burden. The real test is whether organisations can redesign work thoughtfully rather than offer fashionable benefits that only a privileged minority can use.

5 There is a further economic complication. A professional with savings may willingly sacrifice a pay rise for an easier routine, whereas someone living from one payday to the next might find that choice impossible. Flexibility does little to compensate for wages that fail to cover basic expenses. Furthermore, survey findings can disguise differences between countries, industries and stages of life. Treating work-life balance as the new universal priority would therefore oversimplify the picture and risk overlooking those for whom income remains the overriding concern.

6 Even with those qualifications, the findings challenge employers who rely on salary alone to attract and retain staff. A well-paid job can still be a poor bargain if it leaves little time or energy for anything else. Perhaps career success should be assessed not only in terms of promotion and income, but also by what employment makes possible beyond the workplace. If you had to choose between greater financial reward and greater control over your life, which would you value more, and why?

Sources: The Guardian, Flexibility more important to jobseekers than pay, global survey finds; The Adecco Group, The Adecco Group global study: AI delivers more value when people are involved in work redesign. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The findings may not predict how people would act when given a real job offer. T F NG
2. The survey covered more countries than industries. T F NG
3. The fieldwork was carried out in the same month that the report appeared. T F NG
4. Workers with the longest commutes were the most likely to name work-life balance as their main reason. T F NG
5. The writer argues that a high salary always makes a job worthwhile. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

compensate	disguise	emerged	outweigh	retain	rigid	sacrifice	undermine

1. After weeks of debate, a clear favourite finally _____ from the shortlist.
2. Averages can _____ large differences between regions.
3. No amount of free time can _____ for wages that do not cover the rent.
4. A _____ timetable leaves no room for unexpected family emergencies.
5. She was willing to _____ a higher salary in return for shorter hours.
6. The firm offered extra holiday in order to _____ its best engineers rather than lose them to rivals.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. Flexible hours made the schedule far more _____ for working parents. (MANAGE)
2. Many employees feel a growing _____ with rigid office rules. (SATISFY)
3. The company's _____ to adapt cost it several talented staff. (WILLING)
4. A _____ view of the survey ignores what different roles need. (SIMPLE)
5. A _____ of staff forced the clinic to cut its opening hours. (SHORT)

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Collocations are fixed partners. Learn the pair as one unit, and notice whether the gap is a verb, an adjective or a noun.

bargain **capture** **concern** **contact** **expenses** **narrow** **strike**

1. It is difficult for any manager to _____ a balance between fairness and efficiency.
2. For many parents, the cost of childcare is the overriding _____ .
3. A job with a huge salary but no free time can still turn out to be a poor _____ .
4. Wages that cannot cover basic _____ leave little room for choice.
5. Video calls help, but some tasks still depend on face-to-face _____ .

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. How could a company offer flexibility to some staff without creating unfairness for others?
2. If you had to choose between greater financial reward and greater control over your life, which would you value more, and why?
3. Should success at work be judged by what a job allows people to do outside it?

9 Role-play: a better deal at work

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the manager

Your employee wants to change their working hours. The shop is busy in the evenings and you need enough staff. Ask at least two questions before you decide. You can say yes, no, or yes with a condition.

Student B · the employee

You would like to start earlier and finish earlier so you can be home for your family. You could accept a little less pay. Explain why this matters to you and how the work will still get done.

Useful phrases

I'd like to talk about my working hours.
I'd be happy to earn a bit less if I could finish earlier.
It'd make a big difference to my family.
How would the team cover the busy evenings?
I'm afraid we can't change everyone's hours.
Could we try it for a month and see how it goes?

Afterwards, tell the class: did you agree a deal, and was it fair for the rest of the team?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 H · 2 A · 3 B · 4 D · 5 E · 6 C · 7 F · 8 G

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 T · 3 F · 4 NG · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 emerged · 2 disguise · 3 compensate · 4 rigid · 5 sacrifice · 6 retain

6 Word forms

1 manageable · 2 dissatisfaction · 3 unwillingness · 4 simplistic · 5 shortage

7 Language focus

1 strike · 2 concern · 3 bargain · 4 expenses · 5 contact

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