An Examination of the Underlying Concern of Work-Life Balance for Managerial Intellectual Learning

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Abstract:

In the study of managerial intellectual learning by Ho (2013; 2014a; 21014b), a key issue is what factors influence a manager's intellectual learning process. This led to the theoretical formulation of Managerial Intellectual Learning Capability-building Mechanism (Ho, 2014b). It has been suggested that such a mechanism involves the factor of dynamic work-life balance management. This paper examines, as an intellectual exercise, more closely how work-life balance could affect managerial intellectual learning. A brief pilot survey is then conducted using the writer's Face-based social network with his students to gather some preliminary findings, which facilitate further exploration on this topic of relationship between work-life balance and managerial intellectual learning. In general, the preliminary findings indicate that most of the writer's student-respondents feel that their work-life balance status is largely satisfactory and that work-life balance status does not have impacts on managerial intellectual learning, job performance and quality of life. Nevertheless, the research design and research findings, based on a small non-random sample, are not good enough to support further statistical analysis with external validity. Meanwhile, the survey research findings, being inconclusive, display the complexity as well as idiosyncrasy of the relationship between work-life balance, professional development and management education study effort (as a surrogate measure on managerial intellectual learning), quality of working life and quality of life/ authentic happiness.

Key words: Work-life balance (WLB), Managerial intellectual learning (MIL), Facebook-based online survey, Managerial Intellectual Learning Capability-building Mechanism (MILCBM)

Introduction

The topic of the managerial intellectual learning (MIL) has been studied by this writer, which resulted in the publication of three papers published in the journal of *European Academic Research*, i.e.,:

- Ho (2013) on the basic managerial intellectual learning process (MIL) framework that is systems-based.
- Ho (2014a) on the notion of Multi-perspective, Systems-based (MPSB) cognitive filter for management and its relationship with the managerial intellectual learning process.
- Ho (2014b) on the notion of the Managerial Intellectual Learning Capability-Building Mechanism (MILCBM) for propelling the managerial intellectual learning process.

In this paper, the writer further explores how an individual's work-life balance (WLB) status is related to the MILCBM, thus shedding more light on how WLB could influence an individual's managerial intellectual learning process. Knowing how WLB affects an individual's MIL should inform an individual's endeavour to manage his/her MIL process more effectively. The discussion in this paper is based on the writer's literature review effort and very recent Facebook-based questionnaire survey's findings.

On work-life balance (WLB) and its relationship to the MILCBM and the MIL: a theoretical exploration

Work-life balance (WLB) is a state reflecting satisfaction in several important domains in life (e.g. work, family) with negligible bad effect in other domains (Sirgy and Wu, 2009). In

any case, the various domains in life should not be treated as "reified entities but rather as elastic constructions" (Cohen *et al.*, 2009). WLB is also viewed as "a reflection of an individual's orientation across various social roles, with respect to other social actors implicated in such roles" (Davis *et al.*, 2013). Satisfaction on WLB has been explained by the extent of life demands (e.g. physical, cognitive and psychological) being met by life resources (e.g. material, cognitive, and psychological) in the demands-resources framework (Davis *et al.*, 2013). This demands-resources framework has been operationalized in the form of a personal resource management model of Greenblatt (2002) for managing work-life balance by an individual in a dynamic way. The notion of WLB[1], in turn, is broader than the notion of work-family balance as discussed by Odle-Dusseau, Britt and Bobko (2012). WLB contributes to a person's quality of life, which is considered similar in meanings as subjective well-being and the fulfillment of life potential of a person (Peruniak, 2008). For the writer, WLB is a vital contributor to authentic happiness which is treated as the same as quality of life in this paper. According to Sirgy and Wu (2009), to achieve authentic happiness, people have to (i) experience "pleasantness regularly", (ii) experience "a high level of engagement in satisfying activities", (iii) experience "a sense of connectedness to a greater whole", and (iv) experience a "balanced life". Their discussion on how to achieve authentic happiness in a balanced way readily assimilates the notion of work-life balance (WLB) into their more encompassing notion of authentic happiness as both concepts emphasize the attribute of "balance". Such a way to comprehend WLB based on how WLB serves its containing system, i.e., authentic happiness, is called expansionism in Ackoff (1981)'s Systems Age Thinking. Expansionism is considered useful for studying complex topics;

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[1] For Tausig and Fenwick (2001), *work-life imbalance* is also called a 'time-bind'. It occurs "when work and family/ obligations are perceived to be out of balance" when there is a "lack of time to meet both". (Tausig and Fenwick, 2001).

in our case, it is WLB/MIL. For Ho (2014b), one of the life demands for many practicing managers **can be** commitment on managerial intellectual learning, which is intellectual learning on management theories and notions from academic and professional publications. The word used here is "**can be**" because whether a practicing manager is committed to managerial intellectual learning depends on his/her personal life vision and life mission, see Exhibit 1 for an illustrative example of what a life vision and life mission is.

Exhibit 1: An illustrative example on life vision and life mission from a business journal article (Lashinsky, 2014)

> "Jeff Weiner is determined to read the letter, even if he's running a tad late… He was unsure of where to take his fledgling career, so his dad encouraged him to write about his aspirations…. The letter is nothing less than an artifact of a young CEO-to-be discussing his as-yet-unrealized destiny. "Dad," Weiner reads aloud……   I enjoy the world of business and the process of problem-solving…   I don't just want to make money. I want to add value and feel as though I am making a contribution to the world around me… I get bored quickly… I'd rather be making movies than making the little plastic things that go on the end of your shoelaces….. After values come mission……   Young Jeff aspires to work in an industry he has dubbed "convergence," or the coming together of multiple electronic and media industries enabled by new technology…."

For Ho (2014b), there is a close conceptual relationship between WLB, the MILCBM and the MIL. It is because the personal resource management model of Greenblatt (2002) has been identified as a key component of the MILCBM (which drives the MIL) (Ho, 2014b), while Greenblatt's model is at the same time a model on dynamic WLB management. Thus, the subject of WLB is capable to offer useful knowledge to enhance the notion of MILCBM. In turn, the MILCBM notion informs managers on how to manage the MIL more effectively. Figure 1 provides an

explicit picture on this conceptual relationship between WLB, the MILCBM and the MIL.

Figure 1: The relationship between an individual's WLB concerns and the MILCBM
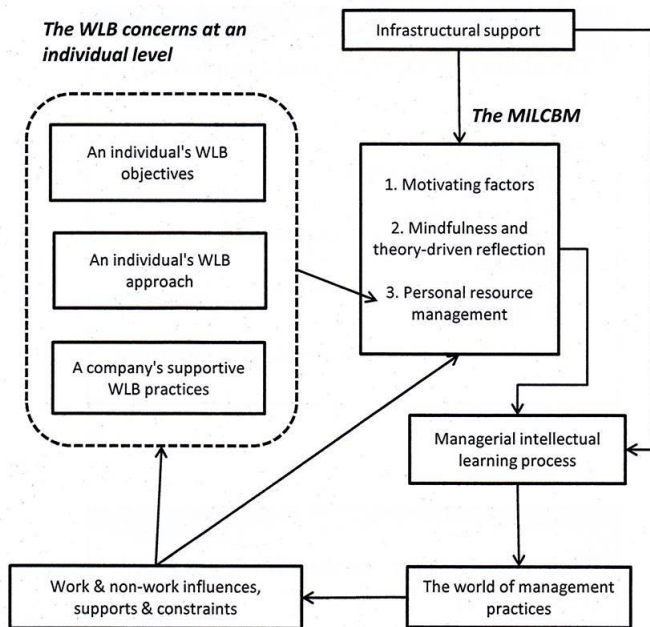
In Figure 1, the WLB concerns at an individual level are related to the MILCBM and the MIL process. The MILCBM and the MIL process have been explained in Ho (2014b), thus not further explained here. Figure 1 also expresses the view that the WLB concerns are mainly related to the personal resource management element of the MILCBM, the personal resource management model being explicitly a WLB one. As to the WLB concerns, three components are identified in Figure 1, which are:

(i) *An individual's WLB objectives*, which should be formulated so as to fit an individual's authentic happiness goals (Sirgy and Wu, 2009) and life vision/ life mission (re: Exhibit 1).

(ii)   *An individual's WLB approach*, which has been written about by Groysberg and Abrahams (2014) [for senior executives], Byrne (2005) and Greenblatt (2002) [for employees in the workplaces], Cohen *et al.* (2009) [for maintaining order in home-work dynamics] and Turner (2013) [with a more general focus on work-life fit].

(iii)   *A company's supportive WLB practices*, which have been examined in Byrne (2005), and illustrated in HKIHRM (2008) ([that reports on a specific company's WLB practices in Hong Kong] and Aston University (2014).

This WLB literature reminds us that (i) organizational WLB practices are influenced by the external environmental trends (e.g. Todd and Binns, 2013) and (ii) an individual's WLB concerns and efforts are influenced by that individual's life complexity and dynamism (Crooker *et al.*, 2002), comprising the individual's life-stage, workplace context, profession, geography and family context, etc. (e.g. Byrme (2005) and Crooker *et al.*, 2002).) A synthesis of the main ideas from the WLB literature (i.e. Sirgy and Wu, 2009; Tausig and Fenwick, 2001; Cohen *et al.*, 2009, Todd and Binns, 2013; Davis *et al.*, 2013; Byrne, 2005; Turner, 2013; Crooker *et al.*, 2002; and Greenblatt, 2002) is provided in Figure 2, which helps later readers to comprehend the nature and findings of the brief survey questionnaire exercise conducted by the writer from July 31 to August 5, 2014. (The survey questionnaire findings are to be discussed in this paper.).

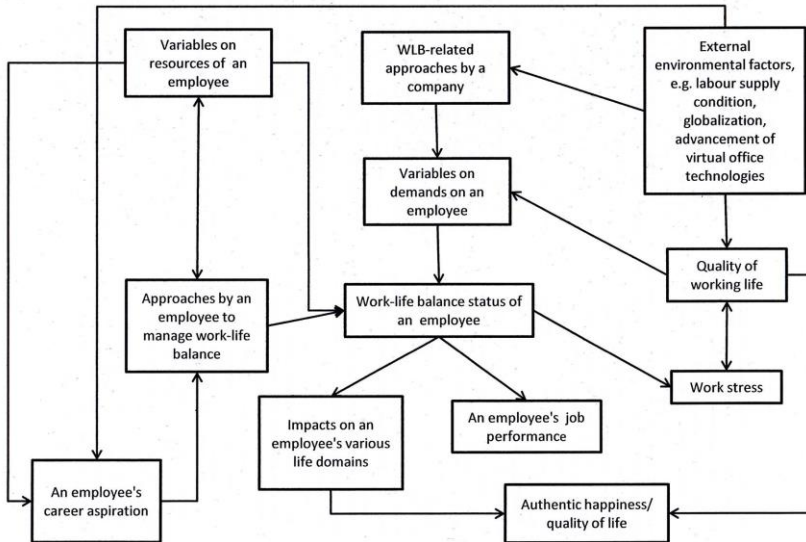**Figure 2: A synthesis of ideas on work-life balance (WLB) for an employee**

Figure 2 identifies the following inter-related variables:

(i)   **Variables on (a) demands**, e.g. depleting activities, on **and (b) resources**, e.g. temporal resources, financial resources and control, of employees that influence WLB status and the personal resource closing balance of an employee (Greenblatt, 2002; Turner, 2013).

(ii)   **The major outcomes of WLB status**, e.g. workplace stress (Bryne, 2005), work-family role conflict (Sirgy and Wu, 2009), and authentic happiness as well as quality of life (Sirgy and Wu, 2009; Peruniak, 2008).

(iii)   **Approaches by individuals to manage WLB**, e.g. Groysberg and Abrahams, (2014), Greenblatt (2002) and Bryne (2005).

(iv)   **Environmental and personal factors**, e.g. globalization, tight labour supply, and the context of neoliberalism (Todd and Binns, 2013), contemporary social needs, available technologies, personal expectations/ priorities of employees (Greenblatt, 2002)

and career aspirations that influence companies' and individuals' views and approaches to manage WLB.

A Facebook-based questionnaire survey on WLB is reported in the next section. Specifically, the writer has conducted a brief survey on WLB with special reference to the topic of management education study and professional development (as a surrogate measure on managerial intellectual learning) to gain some current snapshots of the WLB status of some of the writer's students.

On WLB, the MILCBM and the MIL: some survey findings

The online survey on WLB was conducted from July 31 to August 15, 2014 via the writer's Facebook which has 1,477 members at the moment of the survey. Most of the members are the writer's previous and current students who are studying or have studied for a tertiary education program in Accounting, Business Management, Mechanical Engineering or Computer Science. The purpose of the online survey is to learn about the writer's students' current WLB status and its impacts on their personal professional learning and related management education study efforts (as a surrogate measure on their managerial intellectual learning) as well as on their quality of life in general. It is expected that the findings, serving as a pilot study on WLB and the managerial intellectual learning (MIL), are able to reveal some empirical patterns between WLB and individuals' managerial intellectual learning status. These patterns can, in turn, inform future research in the area of WLB/ managerial intellectual learning study [*survey objective 1*]. (The survey questionnaire exercise is not intended to validate cause-effect relationship between variables as identified in Figure 2; the external validity of this survey finding is very low as it is non-random and its sample size is

remarkably small.) Another objective of the survey study is to assess how useful the writer's Facebook-based social networking platform is for supporting this writer's research activities, especially on online survey [*survey objective 2*]. The survey was conducted via a free-of-charge online survey platform called kwiksurveys (http://www.kwiksurveys.com/) (see also the **Appendix** for some illustrative screens on the application). The online survey is intended to be a brief 3-min. exercise with 10 questions altogether. Thus, respondents can easily fill in the online questionnaire with their mobile phones while, for instance, waiting for a bus or train. Also, it is deemed unnecessary to introduce the writer in the questionnaire form as most of the potential respondents are or have been the writer's students. The online introduction of the questionnaire survey is as follows:

> "This survey is on work-life balance; it is a research project carried out by Joseph KK Ho. For this study, a satisfactory work-life balance means one is able to meet one's work and non-work roles as well as life demands satisfactorily. Please participate in the survey if your age is 18 or above. Tks for effort to fill in the questionnaire."

The questions in the questionnaire are as follows:

- *Question 1*: What is your gender? (a) male, (b) female
- *Question 2*: What is your marital status? (a) single. (b) married
- *Question 3*: What is your age? (a) 18 to 24, (b) 25 to 31, (c) 32 to 38, (d) 39 to 45, (e) 46 to 52, (f) 53 to 59, (g) 60 or above
- *Question 4*: What is your education background? (a) Finished secondary school or below, (b) Finished university undergraduate study, (c) Finished Master Degree study, (d) Finished Ph.D. Degree study (or equivalent)
- *Question 5*: What is your employment status? (a) I have a full-time permanent job, (b) I am a freelancer, (c) I am an active job-seeker, currently unemployed, (d) I am not an active-job seeker, e.g. retired or a housewife

- *Question 6*: Are you currently studying for a part-time degree programme? (a) Yes, (b) No
- *Question 7*: What is the current status of your work-life balance? (a) Very much out of balance, (b) Basically balanced
- *Question 8*: Does your current work-life balance status affect your professional development and management education study effort? (a) It has adverse effect, (b) It has favourable effect, (c) It has insignificant effect.
- *Question 9*: Does your current work-life balance status affect your job performance? (a) It has adverse effect, (b) It has favourable effect, (c) It has insignificant effect.
- *Question 10*: Does your current work-life balance status affect your quality of life in general? (a) It has adverse effect, (b) It has favourable effect, (c) It has insignificant effect.

The questions are formulated based on some of the concepts in the WLB literature as summarized in Figure 2. The **Appendix** further provides some sample screens related to the online Facebook-based survey exercise for illustration.

There are altogether 28 respondents to the survey. Such a response rate from his current and former students is quite disappointing from the writer's perspective. The following are the main statistics obtained from this survey exercise:

Basic statistics from the questionnaire survey

Survey questions	Statistics
What is your gender?	(a) Males: 9
	(b) Females: 19
What is your marital status?	(a) Singles: 16
	(b) Married: 12
What is your age?	(a) 18 to 24: 0
	(b) 25 to 31: 5
	(c) 32 to: 38: 12
	(d) 39 to: 45: 6
	(e) 46 to 52: 5
	(f) 53- to 59: 0
	(g) 60 or above: 0

What is your education background?	(a) Finished secondary school or below: 4 (b) Finished university undergraduate study: 22 (c) Finished Master Degree study: 2 (d) Finished Ph.D. study (or equivalent): 0
What is your employment status?	(a) I have a full-time permanent job: 23 (b) I am a freelancer: 0 (c) I am an active job-seeker, currently unemployed: 4 (d) I am not an active-job seeker, e.g. retired or a housewife: 1
Are you currently studying for a part-time degree programme?	(a) Yes: 6 (b) No: 22
What is the current status of your work-life balance status?	(a) Very much out of balance: 4 (b) Basically balanced: 24
Does your current work-life balance status affect your professional development and management education study effort?	(a) It has adverse effect: 5 (b) It has favourable effect: 14 (c) It has insignificant effect: 9
Does your current work-life balance status affect your job performance?	(a) It has adverse effect: 2 (b) It has favourable effect: 12 (c) It has insignificant effect: 13
Does your current work-life balance status affect your quality of life in general?	(a) It has adverse effect: 7 (b) It has favourable effect: 15 (c) It has insignificant effect: 6

In general, there are more female respondents than male; and the average age is around late thirties. Most of them finished their undergraduate degree programmes. 85.7% of the respondents feel that they are very much in work-life balance; at the same time, 50% of the respondents feel that their work-life balance status has favourable impact on their professional development and formal management education study. Also, 44.4% of the respondents feel that their work-life balance status has favourable impact on their job performance. Finally, 53.6% of the respondents feel that their work-life balance status has favourable impact on their quality of life in general. Overall, the basic statistics indicates that the majority of the respondents have largely achieved work-life balance but the

statistics do not suggest that the respondents' balanced work-life status per se has particularly favourable impact on their professional development, job performance and quality of life. Further findings were also obtained via interactive query on the survey records (re: appendix 6). The findings are as follows:

(i) All respondents who are married feel that their work-lives are balanced; while 75% of respondents who are single feel that they have work-life imbalance.

(ii) For the four respondents who feel that they have work-life imbalance, 2 of them still feel that their work-life imbalance status has favourable effect on their professional development and management education study effort. For the twenty three respondents (82% of the total respondents) who feel that they have balanced work-life, twelve (52%) feel that their work-life balance status has favourable impact on the professional development and management education study effort. This suggests that work-life balance status per se has indeterminate impact (or even slightly negative impact) on the respondents' professional development and management education study effort (which is considered as a surrogate measure on managerial intellectual learning in this paper.).

(iii) For the four respondents who feel that they have work-life imbalance, three of them (75%; i.e., 3/4) feel that their work-life imbalance status has favourable impact on their job performance; and three of them (75% of the four respondents) also feel that their work-life imbalance status has favourable impact on their quality of life. For the twenty-four respondents who feel a balanced work-life, eight of them (33.3%) feel that their work-life balance status has favourable impact on their job performance, and twelve of them (50%) feel that their work-life balance status has favourable impact on their quality of life. Overall, more respondents (in % terms) with work-life imbalance in this survey reported favourable impact on job performance and

quality of life than those with work-life balance (in % terms). Such a survey finding is unexpected though the survey sample size is very small to have much external validity and the survey covers only a limited number of variables/ attributes, with some key mediating variables not included. Anyway, the survey finding is also not good enough to support cause-effect analysis.

(iv) For the four respondents who feel that their work-life is very much out of balance, three of them (75%; i.e., 3/4) still maintain that their work-life balance status has favourable effect on their job performance and quality of life in general; and that two of them (50%, i.e. 2/4) maintain that their work-life balance status has favourable effect on their professional development and management education study effort. Again, this finding is quite unexpected, which requires additional research methods, e.g. face-to-face interview, to find out how these respondents form these views.

From this interactive query exercise, the resultant statistics suggest that married people are more able to achieve work-life balance than those who are single; more respondents with work-life imbalance (75% of all those with work-life imbalance) feel their imbalance status has favourable impact on their job performance and quality of life than those with work-life balance (33.3% and 50% of all those with work-life balance) in percentage term. Also, it is not clear why many of those whose work-lives are very much out of balance still maintain that their work-life balance status has favourable effect on their job performance, professional development and quality of life. All in all, the inconclusive, somewhat strange and inexplicable survey findings signify that the relationship between work-life balance, job performance, managerial professional development (and the managerial intellectual learning) and quality of life are indeed complex and idiosyncratic in nature, as also displayed in Figure

2. Besides, it probably indicates the limitation of using Facebook based survey questionnaire, when restricted to the writer's social network, to investigate this complex topic. Research methods other than questionnaire survey, e.g., autobiography (see Cohen *et al*., 2009) and life history methodology (see Jones, 1983), should also be considered to examine this subject. Researchers who are interested in launching a full-fledged descriptive or analytic survey research on this topic of WLB/ MIL are highly encouraged to do so.

Some remarks on the questionnaire survey exercise

A few comments on the Facebook-based questionnaire survey exercise are made here: the writer finds it very convenient to conduct online questionnaire survey via his Facebook. Constructing the online survey questionnaire with the survey tool and launching it on Facebook took less than an hour. After about a week, I was able to collect 28 responses via the writer's Facebook platform. The online survey tool is easy to use and is free-of-charge. In short, Facebook-based on-line survey is good for agile research approaches. However, the response rate for this survey exercise is very low (bearing in mind that most of them are the writer's current and previous students). The low response rate may be due to the fact that most Facebook members of the writer are not able to see the survey questionnaire posting in their own Facebook News Feed pages. Thus, there is a need to find out how to improve response rate for surveys conducted over the writer's Facebook platform without sacrificing the quality of response from targeted respondents in future survey exercises. An investigation to study the value and practices of Facebook-based survey will be taken in the future and reported in a separate paper. Overall, in terms of the quantitative research evaluation criteria of reliability, replicability, internal, external and ecological validity (Bryman and Bell, 2007, Ch. 2), this survey's quality

would be considered as low to quite low for all these criteria. As an exploratory exercise to stimulate discussion, this survey is, in the writer's view, still revealing. Alternatively, using the classification scheme of surveys into analytic surveys and descriptive surveys by Gill *et al.* (2010), this Facebook-based survey is quite crude for an analytical survey but can be considered as an acceptable descriptive survey exercise. As Gill *et al.* (2010, p. 124) put it with regard to descriptive survey, "…the prime aim…. is to describe the characteristics of a specific population at a specific point in time, or at varying points in time for comparative purposes…".

Concluding remarks

The essences and the relationship between work-life balance, the managerial intellectual learning and quality of life/ authentic happiness are controversial and complex. Their essences and relationship have been discussed in the relevant literature and portrayed in Figure 2. Before doing the Facebook-based questionnaire survey, the writer expected that there should be some positive correlation between work-life balance and other variables such as job performance, the managerial intellectual learning and quality of life/authentic happiness. The subsequent inconclusive and inexplicable survey findings are not able to confirm this correlation conjecture. Indeed, the findings are slightly against this conjecture. In retrospect, such an outcome should not be considered as disappointing given the complexity of the subject under investigation. On the contrary, via the questionnaire survey and the literature review exercise as reported in this paper, the complexity involved in the MIL and the MILCBM is vividly uncovered. Nevertheless, the outcomes of the literature review and the questionnaire survey by the writer suggest that more in-depth study on this topic of relationship between work-life balance and the managerial intellectual learning, in the

form of theoretical review as well as diverse research methods with empirical data needs to be carried in the future.


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Appendix

Appendix 1: The online survey questionnaire is posted on the writer's Facebook Wall (url address: https://www.facebook.com/josephho33) [visited at August 1, 2014]
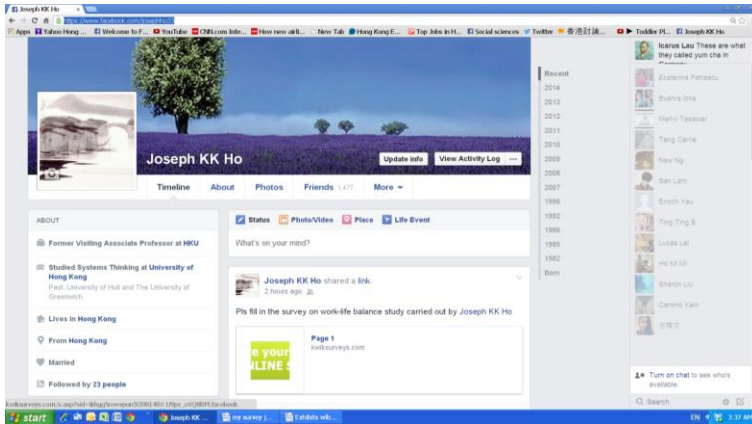
Appendix 2: A sample screen of the online survey questionnaire on Facebook (url address: http://kwiksurveys.com/app/rendersurvey.asp?sid=ikhgg5rowvpun5i398148&r efer=www%2Efacebook%2Ecom#.U9px_oVQ8RM.facebook) [visited at August 1, 2014]
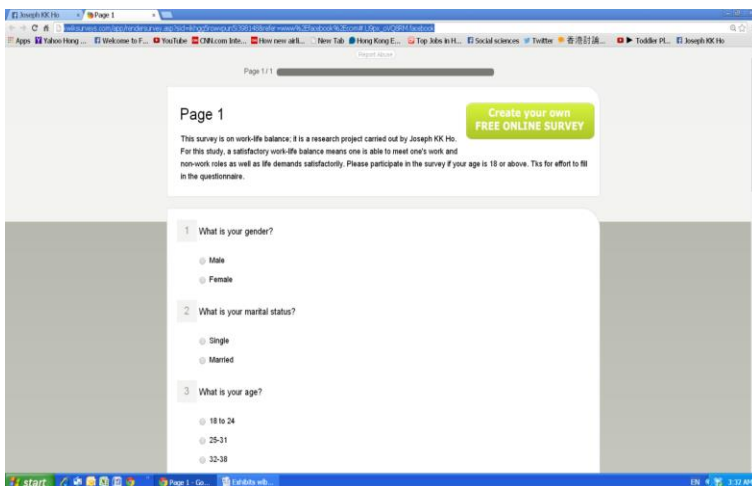
Appendix 3: Some online statistics from the online survey questionnaire (url address: http://www.kwiksurveys.com/app/item-liveresults.asp#/) [visited at August 8, 2014]
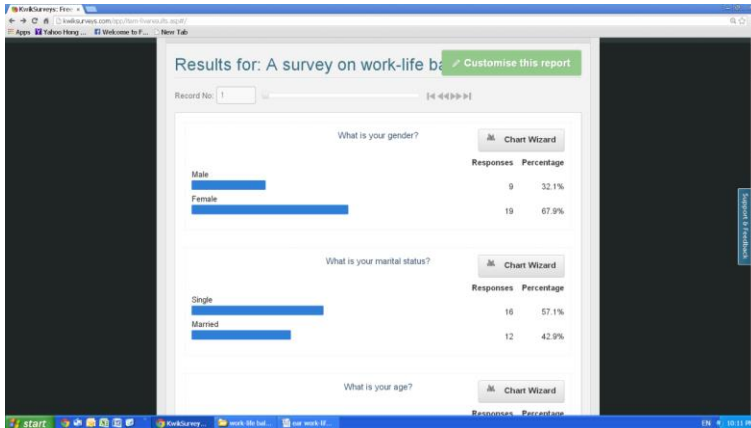
Appendix 4: Viewing online statistics in a specific chart format (url address: http://www.kwiksurveys.com/app/createchart.asp?q=2891725) [visited at August 8, 2014]
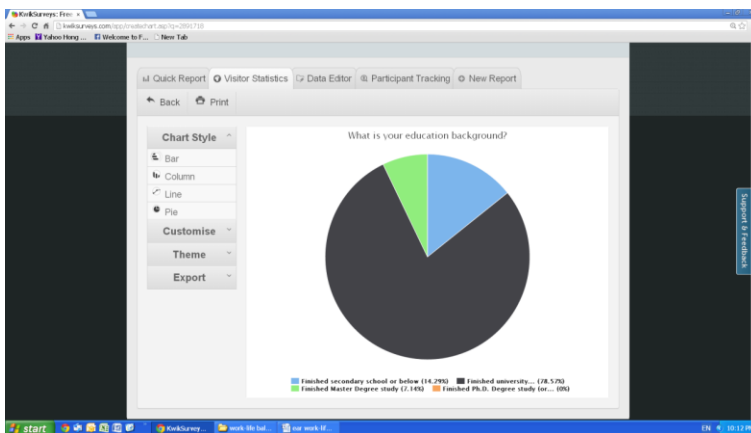
Appendix 5: Keeping track of responses over time on the online survey platform

(url address: http://kwiksurveys.com/app/item-analytics.asp) [visited at August 7, 2014]
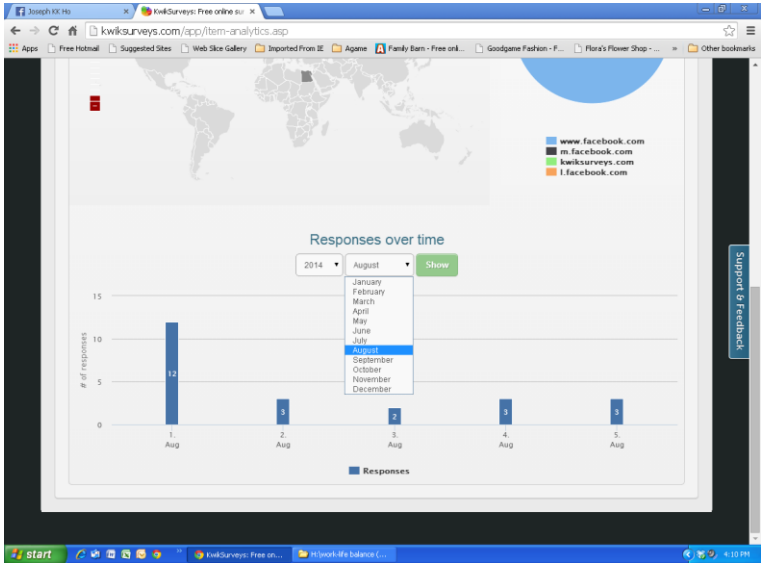
Appendix 6: Analyzing survey records exported to Excel with the filtering function