



News release

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Business stress levels up – but still among lowest in world

Australian business owners are amongst those least affected by stress in the wake of the GFC, according to a new global study. The Grant Thornton International Business Report (IBR) 2010, which covers the opinions of over 7,400 business owners across 36 economies*, found that just over a third (36%) of business leaders in Australia claimed to have experienced increased stress levels in the last year, compared to an average of 65% in the Asia Pacific region and 56% globally.

Only leaders of privately held businesses (PHBs) in Sweden (23%), Denmark (25%) and Finland (33%) reported lower levels of stress increase than those in Australia. At the other end of the scale, Mainland China tops the league for the most stressed leaders (see figure 1).

Business leaders in Victoria reported fewest cases of increased stress, with only a quarter (26%) feeling more stressed than they did a year ago. South Australian business owners on the other hand have been most affected, with 46% claiming their stress levels had increased in the last year.

Not surprisingly, pressure on cashflow (28%) was the biggest concern in Australia in the last twelve months, followed by the economic climate (27%). Those in New South Wales were most likely to have felt the impact of cashflow concerns, with 38% claiming this as their biggest source of stress. For West Australians and those in Victoria, office politics in the workplace was a significant stress source - second to economic climate and cashflow pressures respectively - whereas globally this was only the seventh biggest concern for business leaders.

Overworked leaders in Queensland were most affected by heavy workloads (21%), after cashflow pressures (30%), whereas stressed South Australians' biggest concern was cashflow (28%) and the economic climate (22%), followed by heavy workload (18%) and regulations/red tape (18%).

Globally, competitor activity was on average the third biggest cause for worry, yet for Australians, market competition is a lesser concern. Competitor activity was only the seventh most cited cause of stress (7%), with office politics (15%), heavy workload (15%), regulations/red tape (13%), delivering quality (11%) and work/life balance conflicts (8%) more pressing concerns for Australian business leaders.

Tony Markwell, National Head of Privately Held Business Services, at Grant Thornton Australia commented: "It's interesting that Australian business owners, while still feeling pressure from external factors, place much more emphasis on office politics than

Figure 1: Percentage of businesses indicating their levels of stress have increased compared to one year ago

	Mainland China	76
	Mexico	74
	Turkey	72
	Vietnam	72
	Greece	68
	Spain	65
	Japan	64
	Malaysia	63
	Ireland	62
	Taiwan	60
	Chile	59
	Russia	59
	Armenia	58
	Botswana	58
	Italy	58
	South Africa	57
	India	56
	Global	56
	Philippines	55
	Argentina	54
	France	51
	Poland	51
	Belgium	50
	United States	50
	Singapore	45
	New Zealand	44
	Brazil	41
	United Kingdom	41
	Thailand	40
	Germany	39
	Hong Kong	39
	Netherlands	38
	Canada	36
	Australia	35
	Finland	33
	Denmark	25
	Sweden	23

Source: Grant Thornton IBR 2010

competitor activity. This suggests that they link satisfaction and happiness at work to the controllable element of their immediate environment rather than what is going on elsewhere, which may be a factor in them being able to manage stress levels better than most."

While generally the report showed a correlation between stress levels and days taken off work each year (see figure 2), of the 'least stressed' countries, Australians take the fewest holidays - 15 days per year, compared with 23 (Denmark, Finland) and 22 (Sweden).

Those in Victoria take most holidays (18.8 days) and have the fewest cases of increased stress, while the more stressed South Australians take four days fewer. Tony Markwell observes: "The comparatively low holiday days taken by Australians in relation to their lack of increased stress levels suggests they must be very good at managing stress in other ways! However, global correlations, and the differences between Australian states definitely point to the value for business owners in taking time out to reflect and recharge, in order to help bring a new perspective to their decision making."



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Notes to Editors

*Over 250 medium to large Australian businesses participated in the survey in October 2009. Medium to large companies are defined as having between 20-299 employees.

State	% of business leaders reporting increased stress levels in the last year	Biggest reasons for stress
Western Australia	32%	Economic climate (22%) Office politics (20%)
Victoria	26%	Pressure on cashflow (26%) Office politics (14%)
South Australia	46%	Pressure on cashflow (28%) Economic climate (22%)
Queensland	36.5%	Pressure on cashflow (30%) Heavy workload (21%)
New South Wales	34%	Pressure on cashflow (38%) Economic climate (24%)

The International Business Report

Grant Thornton International started a major annual survey of the attitudes and expectations of small and medium-sized businesses in 1992 called the European Business Survey (EBS). In 2003 the research project was widened to an international perspective covering medium-sized businesses and renamed the International Business Owners Survey (IBOS).

In 2007, the survey's name was changed from IBOS to the International Business Report (IBR). The IBR survey draws upon 17 years of trend data for original EBS participants and 7 years for original IBOS countries. The 17 year trend data is available for: France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom, while the 7 year trend data is available for Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Singapore, South Africa and the United States.

Grant Thornton International will donate US\$5 to UNICEF for every completed IBR questionnaire. In 2009, this will result in a donation of almost US\$36,000.

The research was conducted by Experian Business Strategies Limited. To find out more about IBR and to obtain details of IBR reports and results please visit www.internationalbusinessreport.com.

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