

Doing the balancing act

Flexible work arrangements is key to retention

In today's talent war, attracting and retaining talent continues to be a top priority for organisations across all industries. Recruiting the best talents is only half the battle; retention is the other half.

And while flexible working arrangements are challenging to implement, they can be a successful strategy in keeping your best talents.

Designing flexible work arrangements

There are several conditions that seem to entice firms to consider flexible work arrangements. Amongst these are the increasing demand for a pro-family environment, unceasing dearth of talents, poaching and of course, the high cost of attrition.

Does it fit?

For any alternative work arrangements to work, employers must first identify the suitability of such arrangements. It should not interfere with the effectiveness of work relationships and employers must ensure staff can cope with such flexibility.

Employee satisfaction

Employee retention is centred on individual satisfaction. It is important that organisations recognise the clash between life and work. Therefore, employees' family and personal commitments like childcare and eldercare are concerns employers must deal with as well.

Who is responsible?

Planning and executing flexible work arrangements should be a collaborative effort between managers and HR. HR helps managers gain perspective how an alternative work plan can benefit the organisation.

Communication

Communication is crucial for flexible work arrangements to work; employee and manager must have clear expectations of the new role and set down the key performance indicators (KPIs). Equally important is keeping in touch with employees. Work plans have to be constantly reviewed and revised as well.

Secure C-suite support

The failure of some employee retention programmes is partly attributed to lack of support from the executive management team. Management support is crucial as it demonstrates to employees that the firm will do what it takes to make sure they are satisfied with and successful in their jobs. Furthermore, managers will more willingly embrace and implement a flexible schedule if the management team authorises it.

Equip employees

Staff who choose a flexible work arrangement need specific technology to do their jobs effectively, stay connected with their team and be supervised by their manager.

Alternative work plans

There are several types of flexible work arrangements which should be assessed for the suitability of different groups of staff.

To enhance their talent pool, firms can consider adopting part-time work arrangements to attract talented and experienced candidates who are unable to commit to full time hours. Part-time work is also a good way to ease senior employees into eventual retirement.

Similarly, flexible working hours allow staff to work at times which suit them, offering a better work-life harmony. Employers can benefit from this arrangement as they are able to offer additional services to clients and/or extend operating hours.

Telecommuting or working from home is another viable option which allows employees to keep a closer eye on things at home while enjoying greater autonomy at work. At the same time, employers save costs on office space, recruitment and training.

Reaping the benefits

Adopting flexible work arrangements can significantly impact employee performance and engagement. In leaving work planning to their employees, companies are therefore focused more on performance rather than 'face time' at the office. The trust and empowerment given to employees encourage a sense of freedom and satisfaction, which would positively affect engagement and productivity.

The benefits of flexible work arrangement are not for employees alone. Companies that have implemented flexible working arrangements have increased ability to attract, retain and motivate high performers and experienced candidates. Firms also enjoy reduced absenteeism as employees no longer have to take time off to fulfil their personal commitments, therefore improving staff well-being and increasing productivity.

Takeaway notes

With today's technological advances, flexible work arrangements are more widely practised and not necessarily restricted to back office support roles that require little or no contact with customers.

However, employers need to recognise that flexible work arrangements are not always appropriate for all employees, jobs or industries. Employees need to be comfortable delivering within deadlines with little supervision; separating work and personal time can be challenging as well. And to help staff cope with the solitary that comes with the alternative work arrangements, managers should maintain adequate contact with them.

The best option is to try out flexible working arrangements on a trial basis which would allow both managers and staff to evaluate the success of the programme.

This article is contributed by Ms Alma Othman.