

Work-Life Harmony Report: Findings and Recommendations for Employers on how to use Work-Life Strategies to Optimise Business Performance

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Champions Group

The Champions Group was set up in October 2004 to promote Work-Life Harmony in Singapore through a sector-based approach for a period of one year. More specifically, it aimed to

- document and recommend a list of suitable work-life programmes for companies operating in Singapore;
- develop sector-specific work-life programmes; and to identify other sectors or occupational groups that would benefit from the work-life programmes;
- market and promote the adoption and implementation of best practices for Work-Life Harmony; and
- document achievements and experiences for widespread dissemination.

The Champions Group comprises the chairpersons of the four sector workgroups identified to spearhead this effort. The workgroups comprised best practice companies in the banking, chemical, healthcare and infocomm technology sectors. Several SMEs were also interviewed and surveyed as part of this report.

The Champions Group would like to thank everyone who generously contributed their valuable time and insights to making this report a success.

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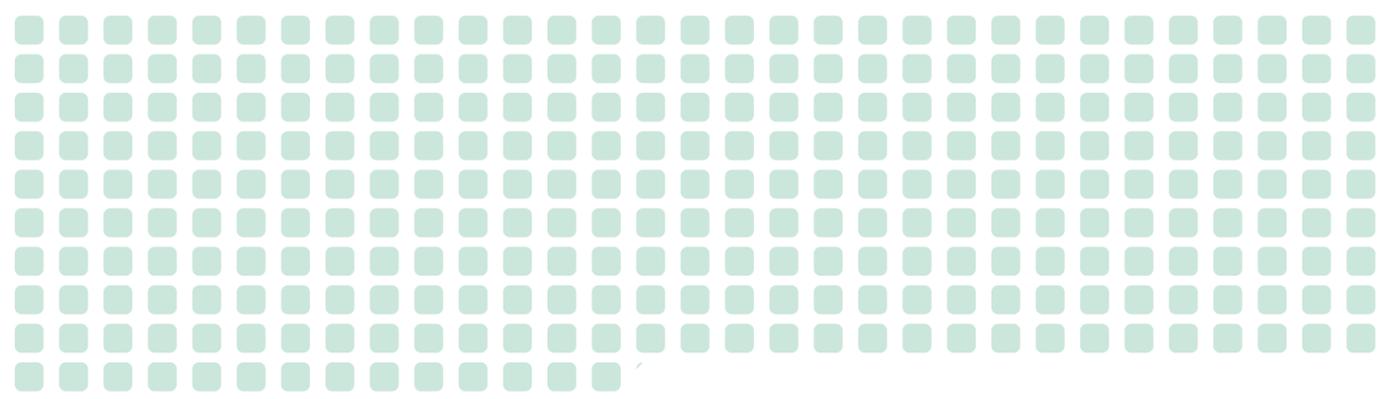
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Companies that were interviewed and surveyed

- ABN AMRO Bank NV
- Accenture Pte Ltd
- Agilent Technologies Singapore Pte Ltd
- Alexandra Hospital
- Apex-Pal International Ltd.
- Apple Computer
- AT&T
- The Bank of East Asia Limited
- BEA Systems (S) Pte Ltd
- Bearingpoint
- Best World International Ltd
- Changi General Hospital
- Citigroup
- Convergys Singapore Pte Ltd
- Credit Suisse First Boston
- CSC Computer Sciences Pte Ltd
- Datacraft Asia
- DBS Bank Ltd
- Du Pont Company (Singapore) Pte Ltd
- Eastman Chemical Singapore Pte Ltd
- EDS International (S) Pte Ltd
- Equant Pte Ltd
- ExxonMobil Chemical Asia Pacific
- GlaxoSmithKline Pte Ltd
- Gleneagles Hospital Ltd
- Hewlett Packard Singapore Pte Ltd
- The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited
- i2 Technologies Pte Ltd
- IBM Singapore Pte Ltd
- Institute of Mental Health
- Jason Electronics (Pte) Ltd.
- KK Women's and Children's Hospital
- Maybank
- Merck Sharp & Dohme (Singapore) Ltd
- Microsoft Singapore Pte Ltd
- Mount Alvernia Hospital
- National Cancer Centre
- National Dental Centre
- National Healthcare Group HQ
- National Healthcare Group Polyclinics
- National Heart Centre
- National Neuroscience Institute
- National Skin Centre
- National University Hospital
- NCS Pte Ltd
- Nokia Pte Ltd
- OCBC Bank
- Oracle Corporation Singapore Pte Ltd
- Parkway Hospitals Singapore
- Pfizer Asia Pacific
- Raffles Medical Group
- SAP Asia
- SAS Institute Pte Ltd
- Schering-Plough Ltd
- Shell Companies in Singapore
- Siebel Systems Singapore Pte Ltd
- Singapore General Hospital
- Singapore Health Services
- Singapore National Eye Centre
- Singhealth Polyclinics
- SP Consulting (International) Pte Ltd
- Stamford Law Corporation
- Standard Chartered Bank
- Sun Microsystems Pte Ltd
- Tan Tock Seng Hospital
- Thomson Medical Centre
- UBS AG
- United Overseas Bank Limited
- VERITAS Software Asia Pacific Pte Ltd

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□ CHAPTER ONE
Executive Summary

Background

In 2004, the National Tripartite Advisory Panel to Develop Family-Friendly Work places recommended that Work-Life Harmony should be promoted through a sector-specific approach. Workgroups comprising best practice companies were set up to study suitable work-life practices in four sectors, namely banking, chemical, healthcare and infocomm technology (IT). Best practice SMEs were included in the study as well.

This Work-Life Harmony Report presents findings from surveys, discussions and in-depth interviews conducted among the workgroup members.

Work-Life Strategy and why it is important

Work-Life Strategy refers to what an employer does to enable an employee to manage his/her work responsibilities alongside personal and family needs. It is a business strategy that contributes to maximising employee productivity at work and helps to make organisations more competitive.

Work-Life Strategy is important to Singapore employers because:

- Human capital has emerged as a key asset that can distinguish an organisation from its competitors; and
- Demographic and attitudinal changes in the Singapore workforce make it more difficult for employers that do not implement Work-Life Strategy to retain their human capital.

How Work-Life Strategy can benefit your organisation

Work-Life Strategy

- helps employees sustain peak performance on the job and enables organisations to become more productive.
- improves employee engagement – the higher employee engagement is, the more willing employees are willing to go the extra mile to contribute to their organisation's success.
- improves attraction and retention of talent – this in turn leads to cost savings from reduced labour turnover.
- reduces stress related to work and work-life conflicts, therefore leading to lower health-related costs.
- improves customer satisfaction indirectly (through happy employees) and directly (through more customer-friendly business processes).

How to implement Work-Life Strategy

Work-Life Strategy is not a “one size fits all” tool. To put in place a successful Work-Life Strategy based on a culture of reciprocity and trust, the organisation, managers and employees need to play their part.

It is suggested that Work-Life Strategy be implemented through a four-step cycle:

1. Establish the need to implement/modify Work-Life Strategy
2. Assess business needs and employees' work-life needs
3. Implement work-life programmes
4. Evaluate work-life programmes

Banking sector

Many global and regional financial centres in other cities already practise Work-Life Strategy extensively as a talent attraction and retention tool. To better compete against other financial centres for global talent, Singapore's banking sector is broadening its competitive edge.

Banks generally build their business case for Work-Life Strategy around human capital management and establishing themselves as employers of choice. Significant work-life programmes for banks include part-time work, telecommuting and flexible benefits.

Chemical sector

Safety is a top priority in the chemical sector. Turnover can be especially costly because losing skilled, experienced employees has a significant impact on operations. It is therefore natural that companies in the chemical sector tend to build their business case for Work-Life Strategy around the need to retain employees.

Chemical companies are systematic in their implementation of work-life programmes. Another common characteristic is that they have to be conscious of the different needs and working patterns of two distinct groups of employees – those that support 24-hour operations and those that do not.

Healthcare sector

In view of the worldwide shortage of healthcare workers, there is a pressing need for the local healthcare sector to retain trained manpower. This is particularly so in a sector where the investment in training of skilled manpower is high. Increasingly, employees who interrupt their careers and leave the industry risk losing touch with rapidly advancing healthcare skills and technology.

Hospitals build their business case for Work-Life Strategy around a twofold challenge: a dearth of skilled labour in important positions and a work environment that is challenging and stressful. Important work-life programmes for hospitals include compressed work schedules with 12-hour shifts, part-time work and health and wellness programmes.

IT sector

IT employees have a tendency to be sucked into a “long hours work culture”, particularly those in MNCs. IT companies compete fiercely for talent, and it is not uncommon for employees to switch employers for more lucrative offers. Recognising that simply offering increasing financial packages may not be a sustainable recruiting strategy, many companies in the sector are implementing Work-Life Strategy.

To combat burnout, IT companies tap on technology to offer their employees a degree of control over how they work. Many IT companies facilitate telecommuting through an open, flexible work culture.

SMEs

Although SMEs are very diverse, they represent an important segment of employers with their own unique work-life challenges due to their individual small workforces. As SMEs face intense competition from more established companies for talent and business, Work-Life Strategy is as important to SMEs as it is to larger organisations.

However, the majority of SMEs do not have a Work-Life Strategy. Those that do, are likely to depend on a flexible, supportive employee-friendly culture that originates from the CEO, rather than formal policies and guidelines.

CEOs of SMEs with Work-Life Strategies tend to take the long-term view that to sustain growth, having a stable core of committed employees is of paramount importance. The SMEs featured in this report are all successful businesses, and their CEOs attribute part of this success to Work-Life Strategies.

Recommendations

To further the promotion of Work-Life Strategy and maximise its benefits to Singapore companies, the Champions Group recommends that:

1. The Tripartite Committee on Work-Life Strategy is in a good position to add to the body of knowledge about Work-Life Strategy in Singapore and facilitate information flow.
2. The Employer Alliance has an important role to play in promoting Work-Life Strategy, CEO to CEO.
3. Industry associations, HR groups and unions have an important role to play in promoting Work-Life Strategy.
4. Employers should learn from other sectors.
5. An easily accessible, one-stop information resource should be set up to assist and guide employers that want to develop, implement and improve their Work-Life Strategies.

In particular, individual sector workgroups will tap on the industry associations and HR groups within their respective sectors to promote the implementation of Work-Life Strategies.



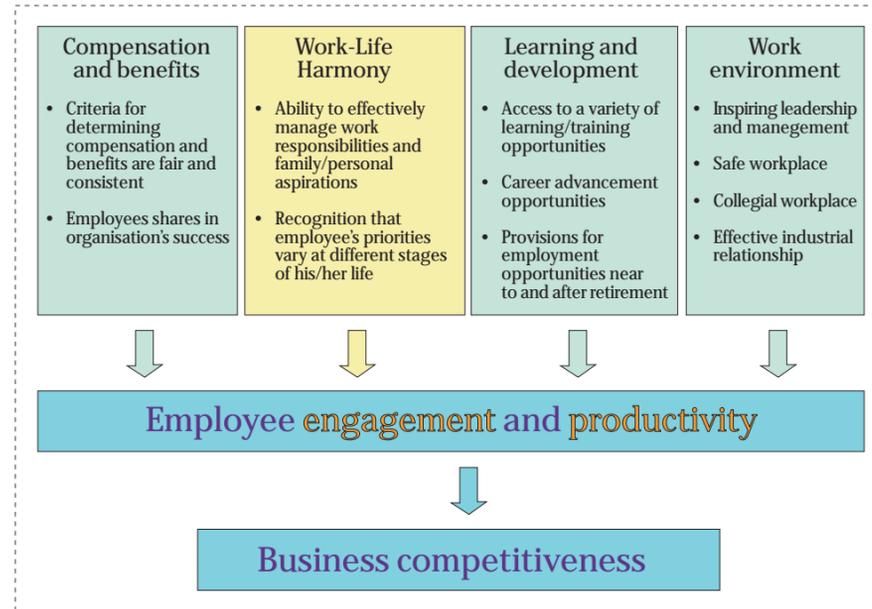
□ CHAPTER TWO Work-Life Strategy and why it is important

What is Work-Life Strategy?

Work-Life Strategy refers to what an employer does to enable an employee to manage his/her work responsibilities alongside personal and family needs.

Work-Life Strategy refers to what an employer does to enable an employee to manage his/her work responsibilities alongside personal and family needs. It is a business strategy that contributes to maximising employee productivity at work and helps to make organisations more competitive. (See Figure 2.1: How HR management contributes to business competitiveness.)

Figure 2.1: How HR management contributes to business competitiveness



Adapted from Towers Perrin

Work-Life Strategy includes:

1. **Culture and infrastructure** ~ Work-life culture and infrastructure provide an overarching framework for work life programmes to operate in. Without them, work-life programmes would suffer from a lack of support and direction.

Aspects of such culture and infrastructure would include:

- employee development and engagement,
- outcome-based performance management and
- annual employee needs assessment.

2. **Work-life programmes** ~ These can be classified under three broad groups:

a) **Flexible work arrangements** ~ Traditionally, employees all worked at the workplace, starting and ending work at fixed times throughout the week. Flexible work arrangements move away from these traditional characteristics and include innovative work options such as flexi-place, flexible start and end time, and compressed work schedule. While they are not “one size fits all”, suitable flexible work arrangements allow employees to more effectively manage their time and do their best work.

b) **Leave benefits (paid/unpaid)** ~ Leave benefits are days off that employers provide employees, generally in recognition of important life events such as childbirth, exams, dependent care and family tragedies.

c) **Employee support schemes** ~ Employee support schemes help employees manage the non-work aspects of their lives. Some examples are health and wellness programmes, flexible benefits and counselling services.

Why is Work-Life Strategy important?

Work-Life Strategy is important to Singapore employers because of three major reasons:

Changes in the workforce ~ Singapore's workforce is changing in two relevant ways. First, a growing proportion of the workforce is from Generation X (born 1965-77) or Generation Y (born after 1977). Studies have shown that family commitments and personal aspirations are as important to these workers as work responsibilities.¹ Second, the number of dual-career couples who have to care for children and elderly parents is growing.

Forward-thinking employers recognise that workers have different priorities at different stages of their lives. Through Work-Life Strategy, they enable workers with different priorities to give their best and contribute added value at work. Employers without Work-Life Strategy will be at a disadvantage when it comes to operating at peak performance.

Importance of human capital and increased competition for talent ~ Human capital has emerged as a key asset that can distinguish an organisation from its competitors. Valued talent – a creative programmer, an effective manager – can be as decisive to a company's fortunes as any marketing or financing strategy. To ensure they attract and develop talent, HR departments in forward-thinking organisations now take on strategic recruitment and training roles in addition to their traditional compensation and benefits activities.

So, what type of workplace attracts talent? Hygiene factors (such as basic compensation and safety) play a part, but major studies consistently show us that work-life strategies are an effective recruitment tool.

- In a 1999 study of 2,510 graduating students from 11 countries (including Japan and South Korea), PricewaterhouseCoopers found that work-life harmony was their most important career goal.²
- Towers Perrin found that “Work/life balance” (Towers Perrin's term for Work-Life Harmony) is a key factor in attracting UK workers. It ranks above “challenging work” and “recognition for work”, and just below “competitive pay”.³

Work-Life Strategy is important because

- the workforce is changing;
- human capital has emerged as a key business asset; and
- advances in technology allow employees to be productive away from the office.

To thrive in the face of these challenges, organisations need to:

- attract, retain and develop talent;
- respond to employees' needs at different stages of their lives; and
- use technology to maximise employee productivity e.g. through work flexibility.

¹ 'The National Study of the Changing Workforce', Families and Work Institute, 2002; 'Generation & Gender in the Workplace', Families and Work Institute, 2002

² 'PricewaterhouseCoopers International Student Survey', PricewaterhouseCoopers, 1999

³ 'Reconnecting with employees: Quantifying the value of engaging your workforce', Towers Perrin HR Services, 2003

What about current employees? After they join the organisation and become valued contributors, what makes talent stay? Again, different factors (such as career advancement prospects) are involved, but studies consistently point us in the same direction.

- Research conducted in Singapore and the US indicates that employees of organisations with work-life programmes are less likely than employees of other organisations to leave their jobs.⁴

Women leaving the workforce represent a regrettable loss of valued talent for many organisations.

- In 2004, a study found that 60% of Singapore women surveyed preferred to combine work and family.⁵

In other words, Work-Life Strategy would help employers retain valued women employees.

Aside from enabling employers to take the initiative when competing for talent, better retention of employees also means lower turnover and therefore, savings from costs related to recruitment, interviewing, training, “new employee inefficiency” and so on.

Globalisation and advances in technology ~ Globalisation has changed the way businesses operate. Services are often offered 7 days a week, if not 24 hours a day as a norm. Businesses have to keep up with events in different time zones. CEOs and managers have to process more information than ever before. Boom and bust cycles are shorter. It is no wonder that many Singapore employees are working longer hours than they used to.⁶

Advances in technology make it easier to manage this environment of rapid change. Telecommuting equipment allows employees to be productive away from the office; document management software and email services allow colleagues to collaborate from different locations. Many organisations make use of such technology to offer work flexibility to employees, although, clearly, not all organisations can – for example, production line operators cannot telecommute.

Some managers worry that productivity would be affected if they give employees some control over when and where they work. But forward-thinking managers set clear performance targets for their employees, and grade their performance by these targets. Implemented well, aspects of Work-Life Strategy such as work flexibility and outcome-based performance management can be powerful tools to improve productivity.

⁴ 'The National Study of the Changing Workforce', Families and Work Institute, 2002; 'Work-Life Strategy Makes Business Sense!: The Singapore business case study of 11 organisations', Ministry of Community Development and Sports, 2004

⁵ 'Study on Marriage and Procreation', accessed 8 Jun 2005 at http://app.mcys.gov.sg/web/corp_press_story.asp?szMod=corp&szSubMod=press&qid=317

⁶ 'The Hudson Report | Singapore | April – June 2005', Hudson, 2005



□ CHAPTER THREE
How Work-Life Strategy can
benefit your organisation

Gains in productivity/shareholder value

Benefits of Work-Life Strategy:

- Gains in productivity and shareholder value
- Improved employee engagement
- Improved attraction and retention of talent
- Reduced health-related costs
- Increased customer satisfaction

Work-Life Strategy helps employees sustain peak performance on the job and enables organisations to become more productive. A study of 11 organisations in Singapore that have implemented Work-Life Strategies¹ found that

- For every \$1 invested in work-life programmes, the organisations reaped an average return of \$1.28 in terms of increased productivity alone.
- When reduced turnover was taken into account, the return on investment rose to \$1.68 for every \$1.
- Employees agreed that they were more productive. For example, more than three-quarters of the staff at the Singapore Institute of Management said they were better able to focus at work because of work-life programmes.

Overseas, the evidence that it leads to gains in productivity and increases shareholder value is convincing:

- In a study covering 500 companies in 12 Asia Pacific countries (including China, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan), Watson Wyatt found that organisations with strong HR practices were 3 times as profitable (64% vs. 21%) as organisations with poor HR practices.²
- The same study showed that flexible work arrangements increased shareholder returns by 3.5%.
- Hewlett-Packard's implementation of a compressed work week in the US resulted in a 200% increase in the number of transactions conducted daily.³
- A study polled 2,191 managers of different workplaces in Britain. 97% of those in organisations with extensive Work-Life Strategies reported above-average financial performance, compared with 59% of those in typical workplaces.⁴
- Another study of more than 1,500 managers and employees in the US found that 7 in 10 managers reported that flexible work arrangements increased productivity and improved quality of work.⁵
- An innovative study of Fortune 500 companies found that when a company announced a new work-life programme, its stock price rose an average of 0.48%. This amounted to an average dollar value of US\$60 million per company. (For comparison, the study also found that when a company announced retrenchments, its stock price dropped an average of 0.38%.)

¹ 'Work-Life Strategy Makes Business Sense: The Singapore business case study of 11 organisations', Ministry of Community Development and Sports, 2004

² 'Watson Wyatt's Human Capital Index: Asia-Pacific survey report 2002', WatsonWyatt, 2002

³ 'Leveraging the New Human Capital', Burud, S. & Tumolo, M., 2004

⁴ 'It Pays to be Family Friendly', Gray, H., CentrePiece, 2001

⁵ 'Measuring the Impact of Workplace Flexibility', Boston College Center for Work & Family, 2000

Improved employee engagement

Much work has gone into studying how to improve employee engagement. The higher employee engagement is, the more willing employees are to put in discretionary effort – in other words, employees who are more engaged are more willing to go the extra mile to contribute to their organisation's success. The benefits of improving employee engagement are well documented:

- Employee engagement is a characteristic of organisations that show sustained profitability and revenue growth.⁶
- The same study compared 2,500 business units and found that those with higher engagement scores had a 50% higher success rate than those with lower scores.
- Employee engagement leads to better customer service, which results in better business performance.⁷

How can employers improve employee engagement? Studies show that it is important for employers to demonstrate care for employees' well-being and offer them a certain degree of control over how they work, where appropriate. In short, there must be an effective Work-Life Strategy.

Improved attraction and retention of talent

Turnover is costly. Replacing a rank-and-file employee costs about 50% of the position's annual salary. Replacing a manager-level employee can cost up to 150% of his/her annual salary.⁸

The Singapore study of 11 organisations⁹ showed that work-life programmes help organisations reduce turnover and attract and retain talent:

- Alexandra Hospital retained 6 employees due to work life programmes and saved \$136,000 in the process.
- 72% of employees in NTUC Income said the availability of work-life programmes was one of the reasons they joined the organisation.
- In Merck Sharp & Dohme (MSD), more than three-quarters of their employees would recommend MSD to their friends or relatives.

In the UK, a Department of Trade and Industry study found that organisations with four or more work-life programmes had significantly lower turnover than other organisations.¹⁰ In the US¹¹, work-life programmes have also successfully lowered turnover and saved costs:

- Flexible work schedules helped UPS reduce turnover from 50% to 6%.
- Childcare subsidies helped Bank of America improve retention.
- Turnover among Bright Horizons employees who used company-sponsored childcare centres was half that of its total workforce, resulting in cost savings of US\$3.4 million.

Case in Point: Sheraton Towers Singapore

A two-time winner of the Singapore Family Friendly Employer Award, the hotel has an attrition rate of 20-25% per annum, well below the industry average of 40-50%.

The hotel allows staff to go on flexible work arrangements as and when needed and grants time-off for employees to take part in health/sports activities.

⁶ 'A Hard Look at Soft Numbers: The relationship between employee perceptions and business outcomes', Coffman, C. & Harter, J., The Gallup Organisation, 1999

⁷ 'Working Today: Understanding what drives employee engagement', Towers Perrin HR Services, 2003

⁸ 'Linking Work-Family Issues to the Bottom Line', Friedman, D., The Conference Board Report, 1991

⁹ 'Work-Life Strategy Makes Business Sense: The Singapore business case study of 11 organisations', Ministry of Community Development and Sports, 2004

¹⁰ 'The Second Work-Life Balance Survey: Results from the employers survey', National Centre for Social Research, 2003

¹¹ 'A Business Case for Work-Life: Work-life effectiveness can impact your business', accessed 8 Jun 2005 at <http://www.awlp.org/nwli/businessimpact.jsp>

Reduced health-related costs

Case in Point: NTUC Income Insurance

NTUC Income has a comprehensive range of work-life programmes, including flexi-time, telecommuting and family care leave. Results?

- Reduced turnover rate – from 15% in 1992 to 9% in 1999
- Increased motivation – as indicated in staff surveys
- Drop in medical leave – from 4.7 days in 1999 to 4.2 in 2001

Work-life programmes reduce stress related to work and work-life conflicts. As a result of implementing work-life programmes, many organisations have seen health-related costs drop:

- At NatSteel Ltd, average medical leave dropped from 8.0 to 5.8 days.
- The National University Hospital reported a drop in medical costs from \$900 per staff per annum to \$550.
- Despite healthcare costs rising at 7% per annum, SPRING Singapore lowered its medical cost per employee from 1999 to 2002.

Increased customer satisfaction

Work-life programmes can help improve customer satisfaction indirectly. They lead to happy employees who are more engaged and give value-added customer service, which leads to happy customers. But work-life programmes, especially flexible work arrangements, can also lead to better customer service and happier customers directly.

Nurses in KK Women's and Children's Hospital were organised in a rigid 3-shift rotation, which gave them essentially one day off for every three days worked. When some wards were given the flexibility to restructure their schedules, they switched to two schemes:

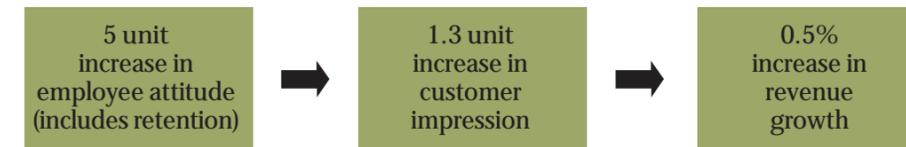
- A five-day week roster with an extension of the morning and afternoon shifts by one hour each. This resulted in an overlap of two hours during the peak work period in the middle of the day when staff from both shifts were on duty.
- A 12-hour shift schedule, which enabled a fortnightly roster with four days off in one week followed by three days off in the next.

The result is a win-win-win situation:

- The nurses win because they have more days off and can better manage their time.
- The patients win because they receive better care. In the first case, the overlapping shifts allowed patient education and instruction to be carried out much more thoroughly during that period. In the second case, patients received better continuity of care, especially in the Delivery Suite where often one nurse could then see a patient in labour through to the delivery of her baby.

- The hospital wins – it has happy staff and happy customers at no additional cost.

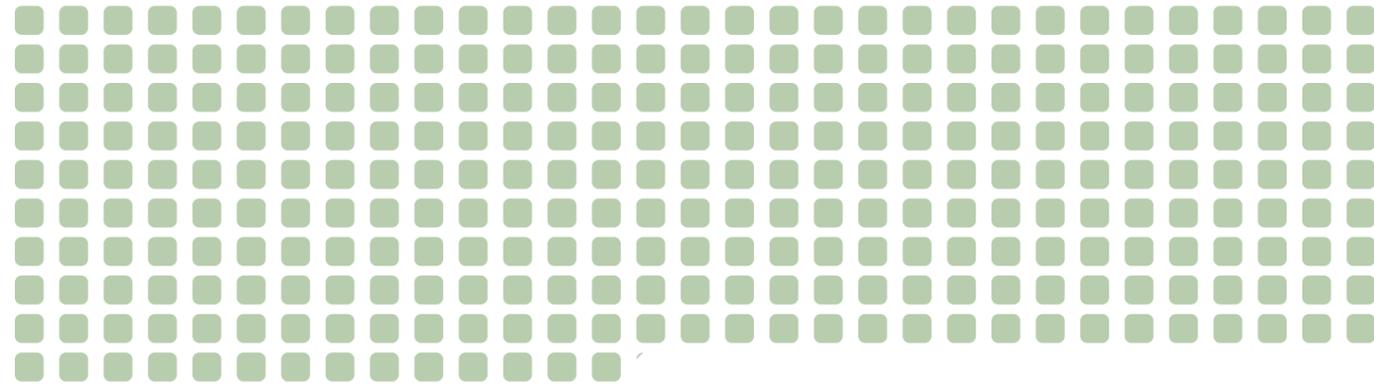
Overseas, retail businesses all over the US try to replicate what Sears calls its "Employee-Customer-Profit Chain". Sears has found a link between employee attitude and revenue growth¹²:



Work-Life Strategy makes business sense!

There is clearly plenty of evidence to show that Work-Life Strategy makes business sense. The next chapter describes how an organisation can implement an effective Work-Life Strategy.

¹² "The Employee-Customer-Profit Chain at Sears", Rucci, A., Kirn, S. & Quinn, R., Harvard Business Review, 1998



□ CHAPTER FOUR
How to implement Work-Life Strategy

What is Work-Life Strategy?

Work-Life Strategy is not a “one size fits all” tool. This chapter details some key success factors that interested employers and HR practitioners should focus on when introducing Work-Life Strategy.

Role of stakeholders

To put in place a successful Work-Life Strategy, the organisation, managers and employees need to play their parts. Work-Life Strategy succeeds in organisations where there is a workplace culture based on reciprocity and trust, with the responsibility for Work-Life Harmony shared among the organisation, managers and employees.

The organisation:

- develops and communicates a Work-Life Strategy suitable for its business and its employees;
- makes its work-life programmes available to as many of its employees as possible, subject to business needs;
- has a sound performance-management system that allows it to evaluate all its employees (including those on flexible work arrangements) more objectively; and
- trains its managers to support its Work-Life Strategy.

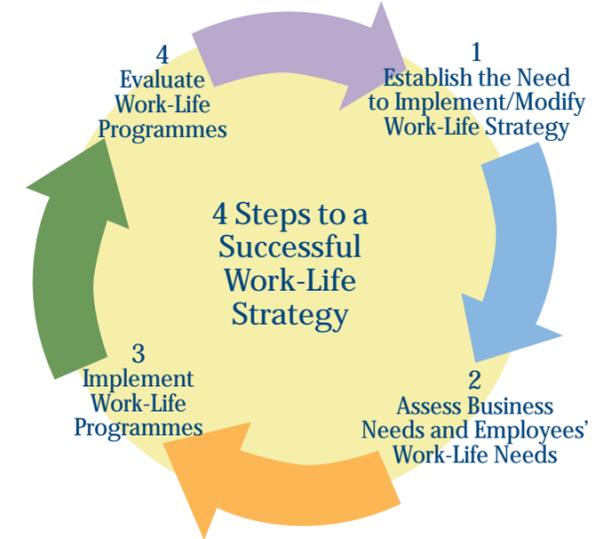
Managers in the organisation:

- support the organisation’s Work-Life Strategy;
- help tailor an employee’s flexible work arrangements in consultation with the employee and other relevant departments in the organisation e.g. HR; and
- evaluate employee performance by outcomes and deliverables rather than hours clocked and physical presence.

Employees in the organisation:

- familiarise themselves with the organisation’s work-life programmes and make use of them appropriately;
- work with their managers to design flexible work arrangements and other work-life programmes that do not compromise business outcomes; and
- with work-life needs met, engage themselves in their work and add value to the organisation throughout their period of employment.

Four steps to a successful Work-Life Strategy



This model comprises four essential steps that an organisation should take to implement an effective and sustainable Work-Life Strategy. An organisation just starting out on Work-Life Strategy would need to first establish what Work-Life Strategy can do for it. These objectives could include high turnover, low motivation, poor customer service etc.

The second step involves assessing business and employee needs. In the third step, these needs are used to design and implement the organisation’s individual work-life programmes. The fourth step in the cycle involves evaluating the work-life programmes. Evaluation findings can then be used to determine whether the work-life programmes and the overall Work-Life Strategy have succeeded, and whether modifications are necessary. Areas for improvement and new objectives could be identified.

It is useful to think of these four steps as a continuous cycle of activities. Work-Life harmony is not just a destination but a journey. To be successful it needs to remain relevant to the changing needs of the business and employees which itself may change over time.

Step 1: Establish the need to implement/modify a Work-Life Strategy

Work-Life Strategy is a business strategy – to make it work, top management as a whole needs to buy into it and align organisational processes to it.

Begin with the end in mind

Organisations have implemented Work-Life Strategies for one or more of the following reasons:

- Attract and retain talent
- Raise morale and job satisfaction
- Increase productivity
- Save on real estate and overhead expenses
- Reduce healthcare costs
- Provide work flexibility in response to changing employee needs
- Increase commitment
- Combat burnout
- Be an employer of choice
- Stay ahead of the competition

Once the need for implementing Work-Life Strategy has been established, organisations can then move on to set targets and a timeframe in which to achieve these targets.

Step 2: Assess business needs and employees' work-life needs

Assess your business needs

To make sure that targets are practical, an organisation should be clear about what its business needs are. Business needs are corporate values or objectives or operational standards that cannot be compromised for any reason. These could be broken down according to an organisation's functional and business units, which may each have different business needs due to the nature of their work.

For example, if a business revolves around mostly customer-facing service, it may be possible to implement flexi-time with some creative scheduling, but it may not be possible to implement flexi-place. On the other hand, if there is a need for 24-hour operations, rotating 12-hour shifts with more days off might be appropriate, but flexi-time would not.

An effective way to generate and increase buy-in from stakeholders is to link ongoing organisational processes to Work-Life Strategy. Such processes include:

- HR recruitment – Work-Life Strategy is a great draw for potential recruits.
- Performance management – Flexible work arrangements make employees more efficient, and outcomes of employees working flexibly can be tracked. If the flexible arrangements do not result in equal or better performance, they can be discontinued.
- Occupational health and safety – It is only a small step from focusing on employee health and safety to focusing on employees' work-life needs.

Organisations with a good understanding of its own business needs and processes will be better able to customise a successful Work-Life Strategy.

Assessing your employees' work-life needs

Different companies have different employee profiles and these employees have different needs. A company's employee profile and employees' needs also change over time. Therefore, there is a need to regularly assess employees' work-life needs so that an organisation's Work-Life Strategy remains relevant. A good practice is to do this once a year.

There are many ways to find out what employees are grappling with in terms of managing work commitments alongside personal and family needs. This section describes three of the most common ones, which are also often used to complement one another.

Type of assessment	Description	What it is used for
Workforce profiling	<p>Workforce profiling refers to mining information within an organisation, especially its existing employee records. Consider some of these questions as a starting point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many employees are <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • near retirement? • young parents? • parents of more than one child? • single parents? • men or women? • married or single? • Which part of the business is it most difficult to recruit employees for? What could be the reasons? • What are the prevalent health problems and costs • What is the absenteeism rate? • How much medical leave is being consumed? 	<p>Gives an indication of the areas of priority for work-life programmes.</p> <p>Tracked regularly, can yield useful information about trends and changes in employees' work-life situations that can be used to adjust work-life programmes.</p>

Type of assessment	Description	What it is used for
Work-life survey of employees	<p>A regularly implemented work-life survey could collect data on how employees feel about</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • issues related to job scope and responsibilities – can reveal concerns about work stress and indicate work flexibility options • non-work commitments and aspirations e.g. how many dependents, whether planning to attain higher education – can provide information about which work-life programmes to prioritise • a list of existing/upcoming work-life programmes – can provide information about which programmes are or will be popular <p>The survey could also ask employees to rate their job satisfaction, motivation, engagement and work-life harmony levels.</p>	<p>Reveals attitudinal information that can be a useful gauge of employee sentiment if enough employees are surveyed.</p> <p>Tracked regularly, can provide picture of changes in employee sentiments that may signal deeper concerns in the workplace.</p>
Focus groups	<p>A focus group is essentially an interview with several people (generally 6-10) at the same time. It involves an organised discussion with a selected group of individuals to gain information about their views and experiences of a topic.</p> <p>The role of the moderator is very significant. Good group leadership and interpersonal skills are required to moderate a group successfully and elicit useful information.</p>	<p>Focus groups provide more open-ended responses than work-life surveys. They allow one to delve deep into a topic to elicit and understand different qualitative views.</p>

Step 3: Implement work-life programmes

Design work-life programmes

Once you know your business and employee needs have been obtained, you can design appropriate work-life programmes. There is a whole slew of work-life programmes to choose from and adapt to an organisation's specific needs. They generally fall into 3 broad categories:

- Flexible work arrangements
- Leave benefits
- Employee support programmes

(a) Flexible work arrangements

Flexible work arrangements can be classified as "office-based" – the majority of them – and "flexi-place", which includes telecommuting and working at home.

A successful flexible work arrangement need not be implemented for all employees in an organisation. An effective flexible work arrangement takes into account the nature of the employee's job and his/her personality. If either or both are unsuitable for the arrangement, implementing it would be counter-productive. Often, organisations delegate approval of flexible work arrangements to line managers or direct supervisors, who are typically in the best position to determine the suitability of the arrangement.

Flexible work arrangements are perhaps the most impactful group of work-life programmes because they shape the day-to-day operations of an organisation and the daily routines of its employees. An organisation can often reap dramatic benefits from a well-implemented flexible work arrangement, saving on costs and ramping up efficiency and productivity.

Some Questions to Consider when Implementing Flexible Work Arrangements

Purpose

- What is the objective of this flexible work arrangement?

Work processes

- How much customer-facing time does the job require? How much time must the employee spend at the office to do his/her job effectively?
- Which meetings are necessary?
- When does employee have to be present in the workplace?
- How will employee be available to customers and colleagues?

Budget/cost

- What is the available budget for the work-life programme?

Vacation and sick days; overtime

- Will employees working flexibly be eligible for public holidays that fall on their scheduled work days?

Employee skills/personality fit

- Can the employee work independently?
- Does the employee communicate well with colleagues?
- Does the employee thrive more in a collegial environment?
- Does the employee have good organisational and prioritising skills?
- Does the employee perform better in a group setting or when he is solely responsible for business outcomes?

Some common flexible work arrangements include:

Flexible work arrangement	Features	Benefits
Workplace-based		
Flexi-time/ flexi-hours	<p>In Singapore, flexi-time usually means an arrangement in which employees choose when they start and end work daily, as long as they complete the agreed-upon number of hours over an accounting period e.g. 40 hours in 1 week. Companies often stipulate core hours during which employees must be present e.g. 10am to 3pm. (Core hours are usually the business peak hours.)</p> <p>It is common for companies to ask employees to choose a start and end time, and stick to it everyday, so business processes can more easily be planned.</p> <p>Overseas, some companies give employees complete freedom to choose when they work, as long as they work the agreed-upon number of hours over an accounting period.</p>	<p>Organisations can extend operating hours without increasing costs.</p> <p>Can make the difference between an employee being focused at work and one rushing to start/leave work everyday.</p>

Flexible work arrangement	Features	Benefits
Part-time	<p>Employees work fewer than full-time weekly/monthly hours.</p> <p>Employees entitled to pro-rated benefits.</p> <p>This could be a temporary or permanent arrangement.</p>	<p>Organisations can</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recruit from larger labour pool • retain skilled and valued staff if they do not want to work full-time • reduce absenteeism • facilitate phased retirement and re-entry <p>A skilled, committed and experienced part-time labour force can also be maintained to cater to seasonal peaks of employment e.g. tourist season in hospitality industry.</p>
Job sharing	<p>One job is shared by 2 people, with hours usually split equally. Detailed arrangement and scheduling usually done by job-sharers, not supervisors.</p> <p>More common among secretariat, clerical, teaching and administrative functions.</p>	<p>Organisations can</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide more seamless and personalised customer care • tap on wider range of skills and experience <p>Job-sharers can cover for each other.</p> <p>Other benefits similar to those for part-time.</p>
Compressed work schedule	<p>Employees work full-time hours in fewer than the usual number of days e.g. working 10 hours a day for 4 days when the normal arrangement is a 40-hour 5-day week.</p> <p>Often used in service-intensive environment where there is 24/7 demand.</p>	<p>Organisations can</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extend hours of service to meet client needs • reduce number of shifts and handovers for better service continuity • better attract and retain employees by providing more off days • customise working hours and days to meet needs of employees or specific business projects
Flexi-place		
Telecommuting	<p>Employees work at locations away from conventional office.</p> <p>Mobile telecommuting is suitable for jobs where employees are always on the move.</p> <p>Working at home suits employees with dependent care responsibilities and physical disabilities.</p>	<p>Organisations save on office space and absenteeism costs.</p> <p>Employees are more productive – reduced commuting time and distractions.</p> <p>Tool to attract and retain talent with dependent care issues or those with physical disabilities.</p>

(b) Leave benefits

The leave benefits mentioned here are over and above statutory leave requirements, which are annual leave, childcare leave, maternity leave and sick leave. Employers are beginning to offer other types of leave benefits in response to the different needs of a new generation of employees. Some common ones include:

Leave benefit	Features
Compassionate leave	Offered to employees who have suffered a death in the family
Extended maternity leave	Offered to mothers as an extension of the statutory maternity leave provision period
Family care leave	Offered to employees as an extension of childcare leave to other members of the family as well
Paternity leave	Offered to a father for the birth of his child
Sabbatical/renewal leave	Usually unpaid leave of 3-6 months offered for employees who are in high-stress environments to take a break and recharge before returning to work
Study/exam leave	Offered to employees who are taking exams
Time off/urgent leave	Offered to employees so that they can attend to non-work emergencies

Some companies even have:

Leave benefit	Features
First day of school leave	Offered to parents whose child is attending his or her first day at kindergarten or primary school.
Voluntary service leave	Offered to employees who want to volunteer at voluntary welfare organisations.

In the design of a leave benefit, employers need to decide whether it is to be (i) paid or unpaid and (ii) subsumed under the annual allotment of leave benefits.

(c) Employee support schemes

Employee support schemes help employees manage the non-work aspects of their lives, especially the “time stress” that so many of them face. These programmes could involve the innovative use of existing organisational resources, simple gestures of appreciation for employees and their family, dependent care support, health and wellness programmes, flexible benefits and time-saving services.

Contrary to popular belief, employee support schemes need not be costly. For instance, companies that already provide a service or product as a business could extend it to their employees at a marginal cost. These schemes can make a big difference to employees and in turn, employee engagement.

Some examples of employee support schemes are:

Employee support programme	Features
Time-saving services	Includes concierge services and simple arrangements with vendors (usually located near the workplace) to provide services such as laundry pick-up, take-away dinner and so on. Helps employees with daily errands so that they can spend more time on work and self or family.
Health screening	Organisations typically provide subsidies for check-ups or liaise with external health service providers to provide free in-house health screening for all employees.
In-house wellness programme	Widely adopted. Includes lunch-time talks on various work-life and health issues, sporting activities etc.

Employee support programme	Features
On-site childcare centres or arrangements with childcare centres for corporate rates/waiver of	Organisations with on-site childcare centres typically give priority to their employees when it comes to registering their child for places. Employees may also enjoy subsidised fees. Employees can spend more time at work as they maximise the childcare centre’s operating hours. Some organisations go to the extent of arranging with childcare franchises so that employees enjoy a corporate discount or a waiver of the registration fee all over the island.
Bursaries/ scholarships	Offered to employees to alleviate financial pressure and as gestures of appreciation
Childcare subsidy	
Gifts for marriage/newborn/hospitalisation	
Medical insurance for family members	
Loans	
Elder-care support	The aging population places stress on many employees to shoulder the care-giving responsibilities for their parents as well as their children. Support in this area can be in the form of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation and referral programmes • Long-term care insurance • Counselling • Financial support
Health benefits	Include health insurance, dental and optical care subsidies, long- and short-term disability insurance and life insurance.
In-house gym/subsidy for gym or health club memberships	Some large organisations have in-house gyms for employees with professional trainers and dieticians. Some organisations subsidise or provide memberships at health clubs or gyms.
Flexible benefits	Allows employees to choose from a “cafeteria” of benefits, limited to a certain amount of “points” determined by the organisation. In this way, employees can choose to spend their points on what they wish and tailor their benefit package to meet individual needs. Useful for managing costs of providing benefits to employees and addressing diverse employee needs that can change over time. Typical benefits employees can spend their points on include insurance, medical costs, health and wellness, vacations and personal improvement resources e.g. books.

Develop a communication plan

The successful implementation of work-life programmes hinges on proper communication of these programmes to employees. Employees have to be aware of available work-life programmes to use them. Furthermore, studies have shown that awareness of work-life programmes is as important as utilisation of work-life programmes when it comes to improving employee engagement and turnover.¹

¹ “DuPont Work/Life Study”, DuPont Company, July 1995; Hoechst Celanese Press Release; Hoechst Celanese, 5 March 1997; Jon Boscia, CEO and President of Lincoln Financial Group, Bright Horizons, accessed on 29 June 2005 at: <http://www.bfamolutionsonline.com/article.aspx?id=69>

In addition to building awareness about work-life programmes, communication channels can also contribute to:

- sustaining a work-life culture e.g. posters and placards of an organisation's work-life values could adorn corridors, pantries and meeting rooms
- transmitting work-life corporate values e.g. comprehensive handbooks on corporate values and organisation's work-life programmes could be given to all new recruits
- improving and invigorating the organisation's Work-Life Strategy e.g. feedback channels could be used in regular evaluation of existing work-life programmes or to monitor shifting work-life needs

Considerations for An Effective Communication Plan to Implement a Work-Life Programme

- Define objectives (short-term and long-term)
- Identify target audience (including segments that might resist the new initiative)
- Customise strategy for buy-in
 - Identify key messages for each segment of target audience
 - Anticipate audience's concerns
 - Prime audience for new initiative
 - Educate and train middle managers
 - Explain benefits of new initiative
- Select channels for communicating and promoting the new initiative
- Build in a feedback mechanism so that it is possible to evaluate the communication plan
- Measure effectiveness of communication plan

Visible senior management support

A show of senior management support for Work-Life Strategy is critical. Supervisors and employees of all levels will feel more comfortable supporting, participating in and using the work-life programmes. In this way, the purpose of the organisation's Work-Life Strategy is better achieved.

Clear policies and guidelines

Work-life programmes need to be supported by clear policies and guidelines. Policies and guidelines address the values, eligibility criteria and operational details of the programmes. As a rough guide, policies and guidelines for work-life programmes should:

- stress mutual benefits to both the organisation and its employees
- encourage an approach of mutual trust and accountability to developing and implementing work-life programmes
- value employees for their contribution to the business, not their choice of work arrangement
- include an objective, outcome-based monitoring and evaluation mechanism

Step 4: Evaluate work-life programmes

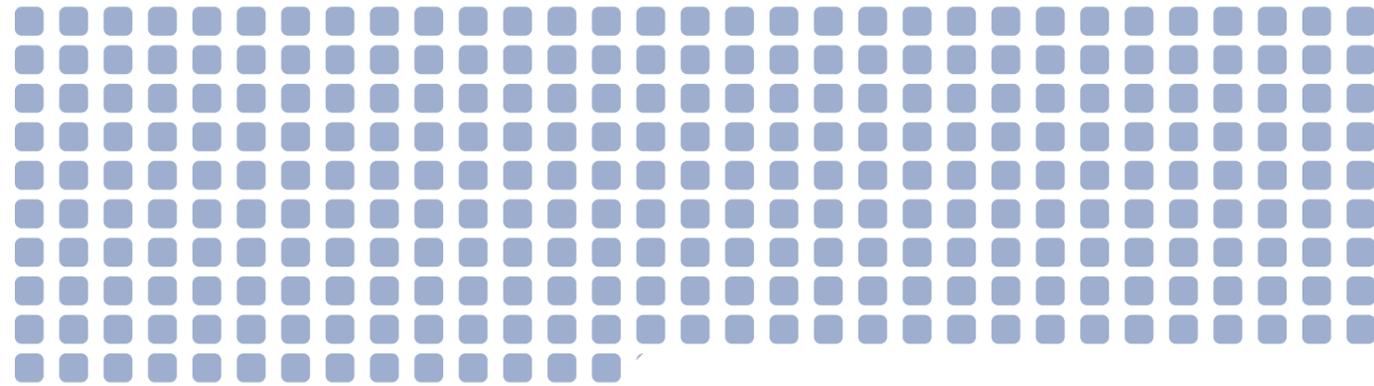
Measuring the effectiveness of your work-life programmes allows you to determine whether they have met their objectives. Identifying a successful work-life programme can help build your business case, while discovering a work-life programme that did not meet its objectives would allow you to improve it.

Some data sources that could be mined to evaluate the effectiveness of work-life programmes include:

Quantitative	Qualitative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absenteeism • Measure of employee job satisfaction, engagement etc. • Utilisation rate of work-life programmes • Voluntary turnover rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from managers on difficulties faced implementing work-life programmes • Exit interviews • Feedback from employees about work-life programmes' strengths and weaknesses

Keeping it going

Organisations that have successfully implemented and internalised Work-Life Strategies continuously review and improve existing programmes and introduce more suitable ones. The many organisations that sustain their Work-Life Strategies and become more successful demonstrate that Work-Life Strategy works.



□ CHAPTER FIVE
Overview of Work-Life Strategies
in the Banking Sector

1999 saw the start of the liberalisation of the domestic banking sector, and of Singapore’s journey to become “a vibrant and dynamic financial hub” .¹ To achieve this target, there is a need for Singapore to develop a core of highly skilled professionals who excel at their specialist areas.

To better compete against other financial centres for global talent, Singapore’s banking sector needs to broaden its competitive edge. Financial centres such as New York and London, and those closer home such as Melbourne and Sydney all practise Work-Life Strategy extensively as a talent attraction and retention tool. This is something Singapore’s banking sector should look into as well.

This chapter will

- highlight pertinent Work-Life Strategy issues in the sector, and
- explore how some Singapore-based banks are implementing Work-Life Strategy.

Work-Life Strategy issues

The bulk of the banking sector’s workforce tends to be highly educated executives. For the purposes of Work-Life Strategy, they can be grouped into these broad areas:

- **Bankers, brokers, traders and sales** – These employees typically work in an intensely results-driven culture. They work long hours, and often must accommodate their working hours to the time zones of major financial hubs such as Zurich, New York and London.
- **Corporate support** – These employees fulfil HR, IT, logistics, maintenance and other support functions. Very often, they are expected to provide round-the-clock services in local/regional capacities and may therefore have more work-life issues. As these employees may not have to be at the workplace to do all their work, there are opportunities for flexible work arrangements.
- **Frontline** – These employees interact with customers face to face or on the phone, and generally require them to be present at the workplace during working hours. With many banks extending operating hours, there is a need for work-life practices here as well.

In addition, the banking sector has a large number of expatriates, some from countries with a more mature work-life culture than Singapore. To compete effectively for globally mobile talent, it is important for banks in Singapore to enhance their Work-Life Strategies.

How do banks implement Work-Life Strategy?

In-depth interviews with HR decision-makers at various banks were conducted to get an idea of how Work-Life Strategy is implemented in this sector. A common theme that emerged was that people make all the difference in this industry. Singapore banks’ forward-thinking HR practices bear this out.

The banking sector in Singapore seems to be more advanced than many others when it comes to Work-Life Strategy. A survey of 10 members of the Association of Banks in Singapore revealed that

¹ “Enhancing Liberalising: Staying the Course”, Monetary Authority of Singapore Annual Report 1999/2000

- eight of them incorporate Work-Life Harmony as part of their core values and communicate this strategic goal to their employees
- seven of them have dedicated officers or teams championing Work-Life Harmony
- nine of them have employees on flexi-time; seven of them have employees on part-time
- all offer compassionate leave and marriage leave

We have organised the information in this section according to the diagram below.



Establishing the need for Work-Life Strategy

Managing human capital

To many banks, Work-Life Strategy is a tool for managing human capital – attracting, developing and retaining valued talent – and achieving corporate objectives. While financial incentives remain important in terms of talent attraction and retention, increasing compensation packages is seen as unsustainable. Work-Life Strategy is increasingly a significant part of the total benefits package.

“UOB values Work-Life Harmony very much. Work-Life Harmony enables us to improve attraction and retention of talent, increases our competitiveness and at the same time provides a fulfilling and rewarding work experience for our employees... One of the key objectives of our HR mission is to establish a premier employer branding in our quest to become an employer of choice. Adopting good work-life practices is one of our means to achieve this objective.”

Jenny Wong
Senior Vice President, Human Resources
UOB Group

Diversity

Many banks, especially the multinational corporations, emphasise diversity and this contributes to the business case for Work-Life Strategy. Diversity is about respect for the individual, and Work-Life Strategy is, in part, about making sure individuals can contribute to the organisation and pursue fulfilling careers while managing personal and family commitments.

Some of the multinational banks have dedicated teams that promote this diversity of backgrounds, cultures and perspectives. Such teams tend to be cross functional and partner with HR to perpetuate this culture of inclusion.

For Citigroup, diversity is part of their work-life initiative. As part of this global effort, Citigroup's Singapore office has a diversity committee chaired by a managing director, and it aims to promote the bank's commitment towards diversity within the organisation.

Credit Suisse First Boston (CSFB) has a global diversity and inclusion group and employs a regional Head of Diversity & Inclusion. A Singapore-based Vice President is dedicated to the development and implementation of diversity and inclusion-focused employee programmes and initiatives.

UBS has a clearly stated Diversity philosophy and demonstrates its commitment by dedicating a full-time Diversity Resource Team headed by a Managing Director of Diversity. She reports to the group CEO and supports high-powered diversity committees headed by business leaders in each region.

“Embracing diversity is a culture in UBS. We believe all of us come with different backgrounds and have different value systems, and the more we allow people to have an open mind, the more creative and innovative they will be.”

Christine Ong
Country Head
UBS Singapore

“You are only as good as your people.”

Michelle Campbell
Director for Asia Pacific Human
Resources
CSFB

Employer of choice

The competition for talent in the sector pushes its employers to brand themselves as employers of choice. Citigroup, CSFB, DBS Bank and UBS have all participated in and won the Singapore Family Friendly Employer Award.

Assessing business needs and employees' work-life needs

The banking sector puts a lot of great emphasis on the area of assessing employee needs. Many banks conduct surveys exclusively on work-life needs, signalling the importance that they accord to Work-Life Strategy.

OCBC assesses its employees' work-life needs very successfully by conducting focus groups. New initiatives are first floated at focus groups to “test the waters” before being implemented. Results from focus groups supplement findings from organisation climate surveys (which also include a section on Work-Life Harmony). These provide HR with a useful barometer of sentiments on the ground. It was feedback from these channels that led to the establishment of a pro-family task force in OCBC in 2003.

“OCBC started a task force to focus on implementing pro-family initiatives back in 2003. We were sensing burnout on the ground – some wanted to resign, some wanted to go on part-time. Work-Life Harmony is a shared responsibility between the employee and the organisation.”

Cynthia Tan
Head, Group Human Resources
OCBC

Implementing work-life programmes

The fast-paced working environment and unique challenges of the banking sector mean that some of its prevalent work-life programmes (e.g. renewal leave, flexible benefits) are not as common in other sectors. What follows are some work-life programmes and policies that are relevant to the banking sector.

Part-time

Part-time work can often help organisations retain valued employees who, due to personal commitments and responsibilities, are not able to work full-time. Beneficiaries of such flexible work arrangements, like Karen Chng, operations support manager at DBS (see boxed story), can work out an arrangement that would help them better cope with the demands in their personal lives, and at the same time, remain dedicated and focused in their work. These employees often have a strong sense of loyalty, in appreciation of the flexibility and consideration extended to them by their employers.

Part-time work is also a practice prevalent among bank tellers. For example, DBS Bank, which has the largest branch network in Singapore, has 200 tellers on part-time. Banks typically schedule part-timers to supplement their full-time colleagues during peak hours.

Culture of trust is key success factor for part-time work at DBS Bank

In July 1999, Karen Chng contemplated resigning from her position as Operations Support Manager at DBS. Her twin sons needed care at home, and one of them needed regular medical attention. Karen knew she could not possibly continue to work full-time.

Karen spoke to her supervisor, with whom she was always quite open, about her situation. Not wanting to lose a talented and productive employee, Karen's supervisor offered her a part-time arrangement. The arrangement allowed her to work six hours every work day, and it was up to her to decide when she started and ended work.

Such flexibility continues to be a great boon for Karen, and in turn, she invests a great amount of time and effort to make sure the arrangement works.

“This arrangement works well because there is a culture of trust. My boss trusts me to be responsible.”

Karen Chng
Operations Support Manager
DBS Bank

POSBank's experience

In 1995, before its merger with DBS Bank, POSBank introduced its part-time scheme for bank tellers. This scheme was in response to employee feedback and difficulties in staffing counters adequately during peak hours.

POSB wanted to gauge its staff's response to the part-time scheme before implementing it at all its branches as an overwhelming response could potentially disrupt operations. The bank therefore decided to first pilot the scheme at only certain branches.

The pilot was a success. Peak-hour staffing was improved. The number of tellers who applied to work part-time was manageable. Working part-time meant less pay, and it was not an option that the tellers would consider unless they had genuine needs. POSBank subsequently introduced the scheme at all its branches.

POSBank's experience is instructive. Often, potentially beneficial schemes have possible effects that are negative and counter-productive. In POSBank's case, branch managers were concerned that too many tellers would work part-time if they were allowed to. However, rather than aborting the scheme altogether, POSBank prudently piloted it at a few branches. This ensured that the bank could remedy the situation if there was an overwhelming response to the scheme.

As things turned out, the floodgates were never in danger of opening. POSBank's innovative part-time scheme helped the bank cope with peak-hour service demands without over-hiring. The introduction of the part-time scheme also sent a positive message to employees: POSBank had a supportive and flexible culture – even if you could not work full-time, the bank could still employ you on a part-time basis.

Telecommuting

Telecommuting seems to be an emerging trend in some banks, especially among support functions. In a typical telecommuting arrangement, the telecommuter works a certain number of days at home. Details of the arrangement would be discussed with their supervisors and sometimes colleagues and direct reports. This is useful for employees who have family care needs.

To facilitate these discussions and ensure that the arrangement works smoothly, detailed formal policies on telecommuting programmes are available to employees and their supervisors. Complementing these are stringent, comprehensive, transparent performance-management systems, which ensure that employees are evaluated based on mutually agreed targets and outcomes.

A related issue that surfaces in telecommuting arrangements is the security of sensitive information. Some banks have shown that this can be partially overcome. In the first place, not all work is sensitive and needs to be done in a secure environment. A solution that some banks have come up with is giving employees access to their company email accounts but not to financial systems housing sensitive information

One bank that has implemented telecommuting with significant success is UBS. In UBS, telecommuting does not mean that the telecommuter loses out and his/her career takes a back seat, as Elsie Tan, who works in Financial Control, found out. Elsie typically works at home a few days a week, adjusting her days in the office to accommodate important meetings, overseas calls and other exigencies. Said Elsie: "My major concern was whether it would jeopardise my career development within the company... I was pleasantly surprised to be promoted last year despite having chosen to work from home."

"We provide staff with the flexibility to do their work when they are at their best."

Tajinder Kumar
Head of Infrastructure, Country HR
Citigroup

Renewal/sabbatical and other leave

Renewal/sabbatical leave – typically for three months to a year – is a commonsense response to the highly stressful and intense environment in the banking sector. This time away typically takes the form of unpaid leave, with the bank committing to keeping a position open for the employee on leave. In the employee's absence, the bank usually distributes his/her work among the team or employs a contract staff as cover.

Credit Suisse First Boston has taken the typically unpaid renewal/sabbatical leave a step further by instituting paid sabbatical leave (of up to three months) to help retain its top performers. For the first month, the employee taking sabbatical leave receives full pay, followed by 80% and 60% of his/her pay in the second and third month respectively. CSFB's key criteria for eligibility are that the employee:

- must have at least 5 years of service
- is a permanent staff member
- is a strong performer

Many banks also offer leave benefits above the statutory requirements. It is not uncommon, for example, for banks to extend the statutory childcare leave to cover other members of the family.

Flexible benefits, talks, networking sessions

Another common practice in the banking sector is the implementation of flexible benefits, in which employees are given a certain amount of credits to spend on a menu of benefits. Banks also complement their flexible benefits programme by organising talks on financial planning, so employees can make more informed choices about choosing their flexible benefits.

Talks and networking sessions on topics related to Work-Life Harmony are also popular with banks. Recently, both Citigroup and UBS hosted talks bringing together business leaders from the private and public sectors to address the issue of juggling family and career.

Piloting new work-life programmes

One common approach to implementing work-life programmes in the banking sector can probably be applied to any sector or business: piloting new initiatives. Most banks test out flexible work arrangements on a limited scale or a limited period and make necessary adjustments before formalising them throughout the organisation.

Communicating to employees

To ensure the benefits from implementing work-life programmes are maximised, it is necessary to ensure employees know they are available and that the organisation encourages employees to use them.

Banks have many different ways of communicating their commitment to Work-Life Harmony. One example is the staff Intranet, which can communicate organisational philosophies and values, upcoming work-life activities, guidelines and policies relating to work-life programmes and other information related to an organisation's Work-Life Strategy.

Support from senior management and HR

Many banks enjoy strong support for Work-Life Harmony from senior management, who generally believe that employees should be motivated to grow and excel within the organisation. HR is also a partner in this process, playing the role of facilitator and implementer of work-life programmes and ensuring that employee requirements and legal needs are met.

“I believe one of the critical success factors of good work-life practices is to keep our employees highly engaged in a conducive environment. Employees must feel that they are part of our big family! Each individual must be treated with dignity and respect. This ties in with our HR mission is to create a conducive and challenging environment where employees are highly engaged, adaptable and motivated to excel and grow with the organisation.”

Jenny Wong
Senior Vice President, Human Resources
UOB Group

“At OCBC, we believe that work and personal life are complementary.”

Opening line of a web page on OCBC's staff Intranet. The web page is dedicated to OCBC's work-life philosophy and practices.

Communicating policies and guidelines

The policies and guidelines behind work-life programmes need to be well communicated – this way, stakeholders can learn about the values and philosophies driving work-life programmes and how to use them. Many banks communicate their work-life policies and guidelines through its Intranet like OCBC does.

For foreign banks, work-life programmes are often managed and driven on a global basis. At Citigroup, broad policies and programmes apply to all Citigroup offices, but are customised to meet an individual country's regulations. A comprehensive Manager's Toolkit covers guidelines, communication dos and don'ts, expected challenges and frequently asked questions pertaining to flexible work arrangements. An Employee's Personal Preparation Kit allows employees to evaluate and prepare themselves before starting on any programme.

UBS designates client relationship managers (CRMs) as the interface and facilitator for all work-life programmes. CRMs use their understanding of their business units as well as the bank's philosophy and needs to tailor work-life programmes. They also help ensure consistency in implementation throughout the bank. Lessons learnt from piloting work-life programmes in one business unit are also shared by CRMs bank-wide.

Evaluating work-life programmes

Employee satisfaction surveys and employment referrals are the major channels by which banks evaluate their work-life programmes. Banks also regularly make use of exit interviews to determine if their work-life programmes are effective in retaining employees.

Going forward

The Singapore banking sector is committed to continuing to improve its Work-Life Strategies. The Association of Banks in Singapore (ABS), which represents the local banking community and sets standards of good practice for its members, set up a Task Force on Work-Life Practices in early 2005. The Task Force aims to promote the implementation of work-life practices throughout the wider banking community. Some of its plans include:

- organising forums on related topics such as change management;
- active participation in the Work-Life Harmony Week; and
- bringing in overseas counterparts to share experiences and international best practices.

Task Force members have also committed to striving to attain the Work-Life Excellence Award.

The Task Force members are enthusiastic and open to sharing their experiences with other banks. Please contact any of the following Task Force members:

Ms Janice Ang (Chairperson)
Regional Financial Controller
UBS AG

Ms Molly Yeo
Head, Human Resources
ABN AMRO Bank NV

Lim Lok Chiang
First Vice President and Head, Personnel & Administration
The Bank of East Asia Limited

Tajinder Kumar
Head of HR Infrastructure & Country Human Resources
Citigroup

Roman Matla
Vice President
Credit Suisse First Boston

Mrs Seah-Khoo Ee Boon
Senior Vice President, Human Resources
DBS Bank Ltd

Ms Stella Wong
Senior Vice President and Head, Country Human Resources
The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited

Wong Keng Fye
Head, Human Resource
Maybank

Ms Cynthia Tan
Head, Group Human Resources
OCBC Bank

CHAPTER FIVE

Jamal Nasir
Area Head of HR, Singapore & Southeast Asia
Standard Chartered Bank

Ms Angela Lum
Director, Human Resources
UBS AG

Ms Jenny Wong
Senior Vice President, Human Resources
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CHAPTER SIX

Overview of Work-Life Strategies
in the Chemical Sector

The chemical sector is a mainstay of Singapore's economy, accounting for 14.1% of manufacturing GDP.

Safety is a top priority in the chemical sector. Turnover can be especially costly because losing skilled, experienced employees has a significant impact on operations. To retain employees, many Singapore-based chemical companies have implemented Work-Life Strategies.

This chapter will

- highlight the pertinent Work-Life Strategy issues in the chemical sector, and
- explore how some chemical sector employers are implementing Work-Life Strategy.

Work-Life Strategy issues

The bulk of the chemical sector's workforce tends to be well educated (50% have at least a diploma). Two-thirds of the workforce are men, and close to half are 40 years old or older.¹ With regard to occupations, two-thirds of the workforce are executive-level technicians, engineers, chemists and so on.

Judging by the workforce profile, it is likely that a majority is needed to support 24-hour processes with their physical presence, with shift work a common work pattern. This group of employees would be complemented by employees involved in corporate support work.

The less accessible locations of many chemical plants also have an impact on the HR practices of many employers in the sector.

How do chemical companies implement Work-Life Strategies?

In-depth interviews with HR decision-makers at various chemical companies were conducted to get an idea of how Work-Life Strategy works in this sector. One issue that emerged was that the sector has a strong sense of corporate responsibility. Chemical companies look after the personal safety and well being of its employees, and in many cases, this extends to employees' work-life needs as well.

A survey of eight prominent companies in the chemical sector showed that Work-Life Strategy is practised by the majority of these companies. In particular:

- seven of the companies incorporate Work-Life Harmony as a core organisation value and build work-life programmes into their strategic plans
- seven of the companies have administrative employees on flexi-time
- six of them have employees on compressed work schedules
- four of them have employees on part-time
- all of them offer compassionate, marriage and paternity leave; six offer time-off for urgent matters

¹ Labour Force Survey 2004, Ministry of Manpower

The information in this section has been organised according to the diagram below.



Establishing the need for Work-Life Strategy

Retention

Chemical sector employees need to be vigilant and comply with strict safety standards. The work can be physically demanding and requires long hours of focused concentration. In addition, a lot of the work in the sector requires employees to be equipped with specialised training and skills. High turnover is a real concern to employers in this sector because it is costly and has a direct impact on safe operations.

“The reason why we implement work-life programmes is because we want to strike a win-win situation with staff. When a staff member is able to balance between personal and organisational needs, both the organisation and staff will benefit.”

Phua King Song
Director, HR
GlaxoSmithKline

Assessing business needs and employees' work-life needs

Before implementing work-life programmes, chemical companies assess their business needs in a systematic way to identify constraints that might make certain work-life programmes unrealistic. To assess employee needs, many chemical companies conduct employee surveys covering work-life issues.

The People Know Best – MSD's Cross-functional Work-Life Committee

Merck Sharp & Dohme (MSD) factors business constraints into its Work-Life Strategy with a cross-functional work-life committee, which includes a representative from the company's HR department. In this way, inputs from different perspectives are drawn together to make work-life programmes more inclusive. Concerns about work-life programmes can also be identified by representatives from various functional units and addressed at the planning stage.

To identify employee needs, MSD's cross-functional work-life committee runs a "Voice of Customer" survey. The survey's name illustrates the committee's view that employees are its internal customers. The survey is a short one run twice a year, in accordance with MSD's policy of keeping channels of communication and feedback constantly open. Survey findings help the committee to prioritise and enhance the company's work-life programmes.

MSD HR Manager Tong Ping Chuan adds that such cross-functional committees are common in MSD and represent an inclusive, quick-win approach to implementing new initiatives.

Eastman Chemical: Flexible work arrangements for everyone

Eastman Chemical's plant employees enjoy 7 days off in a stretch every month. This is possible because Eastman has four rotating shift-teams working three to four 12-hour shifts a week. When a shift-team is rotated out, team members get to enjoy a week off. This arrangement has the added benefit of enabling workers to take vacations by taking just a few more days of leave.

Eastman has employees who do not support 24-hour processes and who therefore cannot enjoy the long 7-day breaks. For these employees, Eastman Chemical has designed an innovative version of the compressed work schedule. Leong Meow Kit, a Purchaser at Eastman Chemical, has benefited from this scheme. To qualify for the day off, Meow Kit puts in an extra hour each day for eight days over a two-week period. The accumulated eight hours (equivalent of 1 workday) can then be exchanged for one day off, to be taken in that month.

This recognition of the extra hours she puts in comes in handy for Meow Kit – she uses the extra day off to run errands and spend time with her toddler.

Implementing work-life programmes

Developing work-life programmes

Many of the business activities in the chemical sector emphasise systematic processes and workflows. Chemical companies tend to be equally systematic when they develop and implement work-life programmes as well:

- First, the problem or current situation is defined.
- Next, the goal/objective and expected benefits are listed.
- The project schedule is defined.
- Data is gathered on the current situation.
- Improvements are rolled out.
- Feedback will be actively sought over the first few months.

Systematic Decision Making before Implementation: Illustrating the Operational Excellence framework at MSD

MSD's operational excellence framework offered a practical template for developing a Work-Life Strategy.

- First, MSD identifies improving its employees' Work-Life Harmony as the problem at hand.
- To tackle this, MSD aims to formalise procedures governing flexible work arrangements so employees can benefit from such arrangements.
- Interestingly, MSD sees that the benefits from implementing work-life programmes are not "cost-focused". Instead, the benefits come from supporting its people excellence strategies.
- MSD also plans to benchmark its procedures against other companies and MSD's other sites. Building on its own institutional knowledge and that of other companies, the company ensures it does not have to re-invent the wheel.
- After collecting relevant information, MSD will analyse it to determine what should be done to improve the situation.

Jobs in the chemical sector can broadly be separated into (i) those that support 24-hour processes and (ii) those that do not, for instance those in the corporate support areas. Accordingly, different flexible work arrangements are prevalent in these two segments.

Rotating shifts with more off days

To help employees supporting 24-hour processes maintain their Work-Life Harmony and prevent them from burning out, a common work arrangement is to have multiple rotating 8- or 12-hour shift-teams. To take into account medical leave and other unplanned absences, some redundancy has to be built into the rotation – one shift might be inactive but on standby, for example. When a particular shift-team is rotated out, team members enjoy a stretch of days off.

Flexible start and end times (flexi-time)

Flexi-time is a practical and easily implemented concession for employees in administrative roles who do not work shifts. In the chemical sector, where many workplaces are located in Jurong, rigid start and end times may mean an employee is unavoidably late everyday (if, for example, the employee has to send his/her child to school everyday). Implementing flexi-time may mean a minor re-organisation of a company's work patterns, but it ensures employees work the required number of hours while easing the time stress that many employees have to cope with.

Some of the chemical companies allow employees to start work anytime between 7.30am and 8.30am (and therefore end work between 4.30pm and 5.30pm). The companies' work patterns are adjusted such that employees coming in at 7.30am are still productive. This way, employees who need to beat the peak-hour traffic can choose to start work at 7.30am.

Study leave

A few of the companies we interviewed allowed their high performers to go on study leave, which may be paid or unpaid. This is a useful retention tool: a recharged and committed high-performing employee benefits the company.

In 2003, GlaxoSmithKline gave employee Yong Hwee Yee 2 years' no-pay leave to complete her company-sponsored MBA at the prestigious Harvard Business School.

In addition to the move to a new environment, Hwee Yee had to juggle her heavy MBA workload with caring for her young son. She admits it was not an easy time. Support from her colleagues helped – she would get regular emails from her CEO, and her HR and technician colleagues. Her company has also been planning vocational attachments to ease her back into her job.

GlaxoSmithKline's close-knit culture ensured their investment in Hwee Yee was a good one. In May this year, Hwee Yee returned to the company as Director of Operational Excellence.

Extended maternity leave

Another common practice in the chemical sector is extended maternity leave. This is over and above the statutory requirement of 12 weeks, and usually unpaid. Both GlaxoSmithKline and MSD granted an extra month of unpaid maternity leave to women employees recently. As coverage for the new mothers had already been planned, the companies expended minimal resources on this extra month. These were offset by the focus and dedication of the returning women employees. In fact, one of the new mothers actually cut short her extended leave, returning to work once her childcare arrangements were settled.

Flexible benefits

Flexible benefits – in which employees are allowed to choose their benefits from a menu determined by the company – are an increasingly popular way for companies to manage the different needs of their workforce.

Flexible Benefits at Eastman Chemical

- 3 components
 - core benefits
 - medical points
 - flexi points (based on salary)

- Benefits claimable for self and family
 - healthcare – includes medical expenses
 - employee wellness – includes subscriptions for social and health clubs
 - family wellness – includes childcare and education, domestic help levy etc.
 - personal and work-life enrichment

Occupational health

The strong culture of corporate responsibility in the chemical sector extends to occupational health as well. As their employees work with chemicals that can be harmful, many companies in the sector have on-site medical teams. They also stipulate that employees’ medical conditions must be raised to their supervisors’ attention, to protect both the employees themselves as well as the employers.

When Xu Jia, a senior technical support engineer at MSD found out that she was pregnant, she informed her supervisor. As per company policy, her supervisor arranged for her to see the resident doctor and occupational nurse. They discussed her job scope to assess if it was still suitable in view of her pregnancy. Subsequently, the doctor recommended that she be assigned to a more suitable position, something she happily agreed to do.

Collegial work environment

The chemical sector is one where a regard for employees’ personal safety often translates into an almost paternal approach to management. Through the interviews with HR decision-makers, the impression is that many chemical companies are collegial workplaces in which employees are encouraged to voice their opinions.

Communicating commitment and receiving feedback

Clear, unambiguous statements of a company’s commitment to Work-Life Strategy empower employees. They often have the effect of inviting employees to join in a mutual commitment with the company to ensure the Work-Life Strategy is successful. Beyond that, making sure feedback channels are open ensure a constant flow of feedback that can help companies evaluate their communication strategies as well as their work-life programmes.

“Balance – we support an employee’s need to balance work and family/personal life.”

Value declaration adorning Eastman Chemical’s meeting rooms and corridors

Key to a Work-Life Culture: Multiple Channels of Communication at MSD

At MSD, there are at least five regular channels through which HR and management can gather feedback about employees’ changing work-life needs. These include:

- quarterly business update
- staff briefing by managing director
- monthly breakfast session with managing director
- bi-monthly tea sessions with technicians
- “Voice of Customer” survey

MSD’s commitment to Work-Life Strategy is modelled by its Managing Director Russ Watson, who encourages employees to raise work-life issues with him directly. Olga Bonnier, Manager, Operational Excellence, echoed the views of many, “I can just go up to Russ anytime and share with him what’s happening at home and I know he will take time to hear me out.”

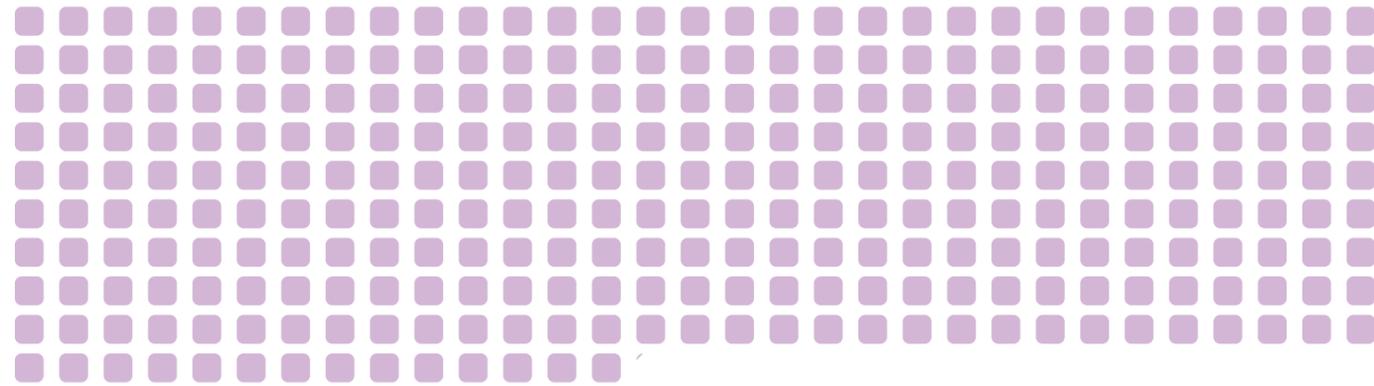
Evaluating work-life programmes

Many companies in the chemical sector evaluate the work-life programmes they implement based on employee feedback. In addition, some track employee turnover and medical leave, which are easily quantified. Although it can be difficult to attribute changes in such figures solely to a company’s Work-Life Strategy, tracking them provides long-term information and reveals useful trends.

Going forward

The sector should work through industry associations and HR groups to promote the following so that companies in the sector can improve their practices from ‘good’ to ‘best’:

- **Listening effectively to employees** – Employees provide the most useful feedback as they are on the ground, and can identify issues that management often cannot see. Hence, systems and tools should be developed to encourage employees to give honest feedback regularly.
- **Proactively looking at trends, especially workforce profile** – A suitable Work-Life Strategy today may not be applicable tomorrow, as a company’s workforce profile and employee needs can change rapidly. The sector must proactively seek out trends and evolve their work-life programmes so that they remain valid.
- **Proactively identify opportunities to implement work-life programmes** – Opportunities to develop and implement work-life programmes in companies come and go. Such opportunities could involve company wide initiatives (such as recruitment drives) or national policies (such as the current drive to promote Work-Life Harmony). To take advantage of them and maximise resources, it is important for employers and HR practitioners to be alert to changes in the environment that will allow them to roll out work-life programmes more efficiently.



□ CHAPTER SEVEN
Overview of Work-Life Strategies
in the Healthcare Sector

An ageing population and advances in medical science have led to an increase in the demand for healthcare services and manpower in Singapore. In view of the worldwide shortage of healthcare workers, especially nurses, there is a pressing need for the local healthcare sector to retain trained manpower. This is particularly so as turnover is costly in a sector where the investment in training of skilled manpower is high. Increasingly, employees who interrupt their careers and leave the industry risk losing touch with rapidly advancing healthcare skills and technology.

This chapter will

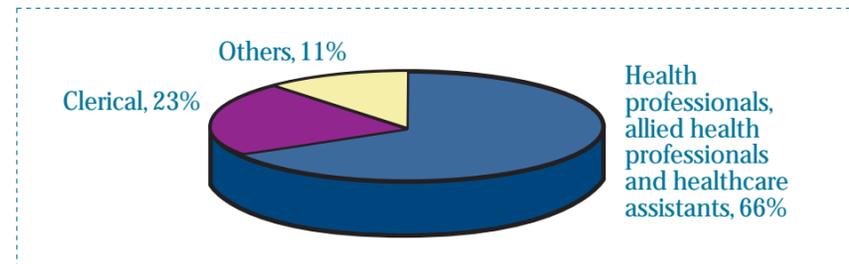
- highlight pertinent Work-Life Strategy issues in the healthcare sector; and
- explore how some local hospitals are implementing Work-Life Strategy.

Work-Life Strategy issues

More than half the employees in the healthcare sector (58%) work in hospitals. 83% of hospital employees are women. Almost two-thirds of the sector's workforce (66%) comprise healthcare professionals like doctors and nurses, allied health professionals (e.g. therapists, radiographers) and healthcare assistants. Clerical, service and sales, and manual workers make up the rest of the workforce.¹ (See Figure 7.1: Employment profile in the healthcare sector.)

Healthcare employees do specialised and critical work. Apart from pre- and in-employment training, they need to have a service mentality to provide a competent standard of patient care. In view of the labour shortage in the sector, the challenge for the industry is to attract and retain skilled workers to work in this demanding environment. Hospitals have found that Work-Life Strategy addresses this challenge.

Figure 7.1: Employment profile in the healthcare sector



How do hospitals implement Work-Life Strategy?

Hospitals employ more than half the sector's workforce. To get an idea of how Work-Life Strategy works in this sector, in-depth interviews were conducted with HR decision-makers at various hospitals.

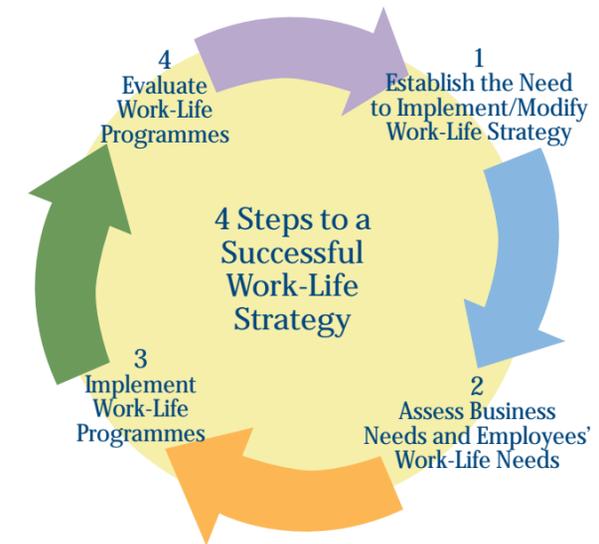
The physical, mental and emotional stress on employees was a constant refrain. To alleviate the burden on their employees, many hospitals made good use of their existing resources and expertise, implementing many health-related work-life programmes.

¹ Labour Force Survey 2004, Ministry of Manpower

In addition, a survey involving 21 local hospitals showed that:

- 95% incorporate Work-Life Harmony as a core value and integrate it into their strategic plans
- 85% designate officers/teams to look after employees' Work-Life Harmony
- 80% regularly survey employees on their work-life needs
- all the hospitals surveyed had employees on part-time work; 80% had employees on compressed work schedules with shifts
- 95% provide insurance coverage for employees' family

The information in this section has been organised according to the 4-step diagram below.



Establishing the need for Work-Life Strategy

"When the staff are happy with the work arrangement they have, they are more productive, and they are happy at the workplace... they see it as fitting into their lifestyle. And if we achieve that and we become employer of choice, we are really super happy."

T K Udairam
CEO
Changi General Hospital

Double whammy

When interviewed, HR decision-makers invariably mentioned the two main challenges that hospitals face: a dearth of skilled labour in important positions and a work environment that is challenging and stressful. To remain competitive, hospitals need to address turnover and maintain a stable pool of qualified and committed employees. Among hospitals, the common premise is that when their employees are better able to manage their multiple work and non-work roles, they can better deliver quality patient care and are more likely to remain in their jobs.

It is clear that employers in the sector recognise the importance of work-life issues. Of the 67 winners of the Singapore Family Friendly Employer Award (now known as the Work-Life Excellence Award) in 2004, 12 were healthcare institutions.

Assessing business needs and employees' work-life needs

Defining business constraints

Hospitals must meet exacting standards of service and preparedness. To develop flexible work arrangements, hospitals define service standards or corporate targets that cannot be compromised as parameters to work within.

KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH), for example, made it clear to its managers that they were free to develop any flexible work arrangements that

- did not negatively affect patient care standards and
- did not require an increase in staff strength.

Similarly, Changi General Hospital (CGH) stipulated that work-life programmes could be implemented only if there was no compromise to patient care and productivity.

Assessing employees' work-life needs

Hospitals assess work-life needs through formal and informal channels such as:

- employee needs assessments
- organisation climate surveys
- informal chit chats and dialogue sessions with senior management
- informal surveys

More than three-quarters of the participating establishments conduct surveys to determine the work-life needs of their employees.

Gleneagles Hospital assesses its employees' work-life needs through a cross-functional team taking care of health and wellness programmes. The team conducts informal surveys before the start of each financial year to determine appropriate activities to be organised for staff.

At CGH, work-life programmes are selected based on employees' feedback. In addition to the stipulation that they cannot compromise patient care and productivity, criteria used to decide which programmes and events are implemented include:

- relevant to employees' needs
- be of interest to employees

Work-life champions across departments are involved in collecting informal employee feedback with the objective of identifying suitable programmes and events. These same champions then work together with HR in the planning and implementation processes.

Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH), on the other hand, takes a more formal approach by incorporating HR wellness and welfare questions into its organisation climate survey. This feedback is taken into account in the design and implementation of work-life programmes.

Implementing work-life programmes

Compressed work schedule for nursing and operations support staff

The common flexible work arrangements in the participating establishments were compressed work schedule, part-time and flexible start and end times (staggered hours).

When nurses can manage their family responsibilities well and have sufficient rest, they are able to provide better patient care. With this in mind, CGH piloted flexible work arrangements that gave nurses more flexibility and control over when they work, thus helping them manage their family care responsibilities alongside their jobs.

"More days off"

CGH's compressed work schedule works very well for Madam Parvathi, a senior staff nurse.

"I used to get just one day off and that was taken up by chores like running errands and shopping for essentials," she said. Under the old scheme, Madam Parvathi would sometimes have to work longer than her shift required to complete tasks, such as those arising from emergencies. With more days off, she can spend more quality time with her family.

"At the end of the day, we cannot just drop our patients like a stack of papers," she said, adding that the new arrangement makes for better handing over of duties to nurses on the following shift. This results in better organisation of work.

Compressed work schedules generally involve employees working longer hours per shift but fewer shifts over a one- or two-week period, resulting in fewer night shifts as well as more days off. A common scheme rosters nurses on 12-hour shifts with a schedule that allows them four days off in one week and three days off in the next on a fortnightly rotation. (See Figure 7.2: Example of compressed work schedule.) Shifts overlap so that staff can leave on the dot after their shifts instead of staying behind to do handover to the incoming team.

In practice, this compressed work schedule differs across hospitals. A hospital may allow nurses to swap days off with colleagues and even arrange which days they want to work.

Figure 7.2: Example of compressed work schedule

Team	Week 1								Week 2							
1	D	N	1	2	D	N	1	2	D	N	1	2	D	N		
2	2	D	N	1	2	D	N	1	2	D	N	1	2	D		
3	1	2	D	N	1	2	D	N	1	2	D	N	1	2		
4	N	1	2	D	N	1	2	D	N	1	2	D	N	1		
Team	Week 3								Week 4							
1	1	2	D	N	1	2	D	N	1	2	D	N	1	2		
2	N	1	2	D	N	1	2	D	N	1	2	D	N	1		
3	D	N	1	2	D	N	1	2	D	N	1	2	D	N		
4	2	D	N	1	2	D	N	1	2	D	N	1	2	D		

Legend	
D	Day shift
N	Night shift
1	First day off
2	Second say off

The extended shifts translate to better quality care for patients – nurses are able to better plan their patient care duties such as giving medicine, feeding and cleaning, as well as patient education and instruction. This arrangement also allows them more flexibility in using their days off.

Part-time

Part-time is a feasible solution to the needs of mothers returning to the workforce. It also helps to retain skilled talent who would otherwise consider resigning to take care of their infants. There is potential for part-time arrangements to be more widely implemented.

At CGH, part-time work applies to nurses, allied health and some clerical staff. Part-time exists mainly as a reduced work week for most cases e.g. three or four full days in a week.

Leave benefits

At least 90% of the surveyed hospitals provide compassionate, paternity, marriage leave, family care and urgent time-off for all staff. Unpaid leave for family or personal reasons, on the other hand, are granted on a case-by-case basis and is often used as a retention strategy for high performers.

Health and wellness programmes

Being in the healthcare business, most hospitals run health and wellness programmes. Some hospitals see this as a way to maximise organisational resources and expertise. For example, driven by the belief that “health is wealth”, CGH conducts health screenings, fitness tests and exercise programmes for all its employees. On Singapore’s first ACTIVE (All Companies Together In Various Exercises) Day, 400 CGH employees took part in a mass workout in the hospital lobby. Patient service assistants even attended to patients in their sportswear.

Visible support from senior management

Senior management’s support for Work-Life Strategy goes a long way to ensuring the success of work-life programmes. Parkway Group, which owns East Shore, Gleneagles and Mount Elizabeth Hospitals, takes Work-Life Strategy very seriously – Gleneagles’ general manager of corporate manpower heads Parkway’s Quality Work-Life programme. Gleneagles itself holds regular dialogue sessions with employees covering different topics including work-life issues. Individual departments are also given the autonomy to make decisions on work flexibility.

TTSH has set up a department to raise the visibility of work-life programmes in the hospital. TTSH also communicates its commitment to Work-Life Harmony with awards for the healthiest department and for employees who lose the most weight.

Training middle management

To ensure that senior management’s commitment to Work-Life Harmony cascades down to middle management, some hospitals train middle managers to implement and manage work-life programmes. As middle managers run the hospitals day to day and are constantly in touch with employees, this helps to perpetuate a positive work-life culture.

“We are in healthcare and therefore we have to be and look more healthy than our patients. On a more serious note, staff welfare is also important to us, as a happy and healthy staff will be able to provide better care and service for our patients.”

Liak Teng Lit
CEO
Alexandra Hospital

“We recognise the contribution of every employee and value their families as part of the CGH family circle. Our work-life programmes were planned out with the employees’ families in mind to give them the same level of care that we give to our employees.”

Wong Ai Lee
Manager, Rehabilitative Services
Changi General Hospital

Hospitals generally ensure that the training includes topics such as:

- how to counsel and lead staff in managing their work-life issues more effectively
- the organisation’s work-life practices and policies
- managing employees based on outcomes

KKH’s Work-Life Unit has also produced work-life guidebooks specifically for managers to help them understand, deploy and manage the hospital’s work-life programmes effectively.

Work-Life Training

KKH

- Training covers
 - principles of work-life programmes
 - information on KKH’s programmes and policies
 - work issues arising from implementation of work-life programmes
 - management skills based on output and performance

AH

- Training for managers and supervisors
- Training focuses on
 - AH’s work-life implementation framework
 - case examples
 - roles and expectations

Communicating policies and guidelines

In hospitals, employees are informed of upcoming work-life programmes mainly through channels such as notice boards, circulars, emails, newsletters and regular team meetings and briefings. More detailed information may be shared during the launch of major programmes or during management dialogues with employees. HR and work-life champions also keep feedback channels open to stay plugged in to employees’ reactions to past and upcoming programmes.

At KKH, HR communicates with employees through talks, the work-life Intranet, KK Hub newsletter and notice boards. CGH’s CEO conducts regular communication sessions with staff to talk about its work-life programmes, among other staff issues.

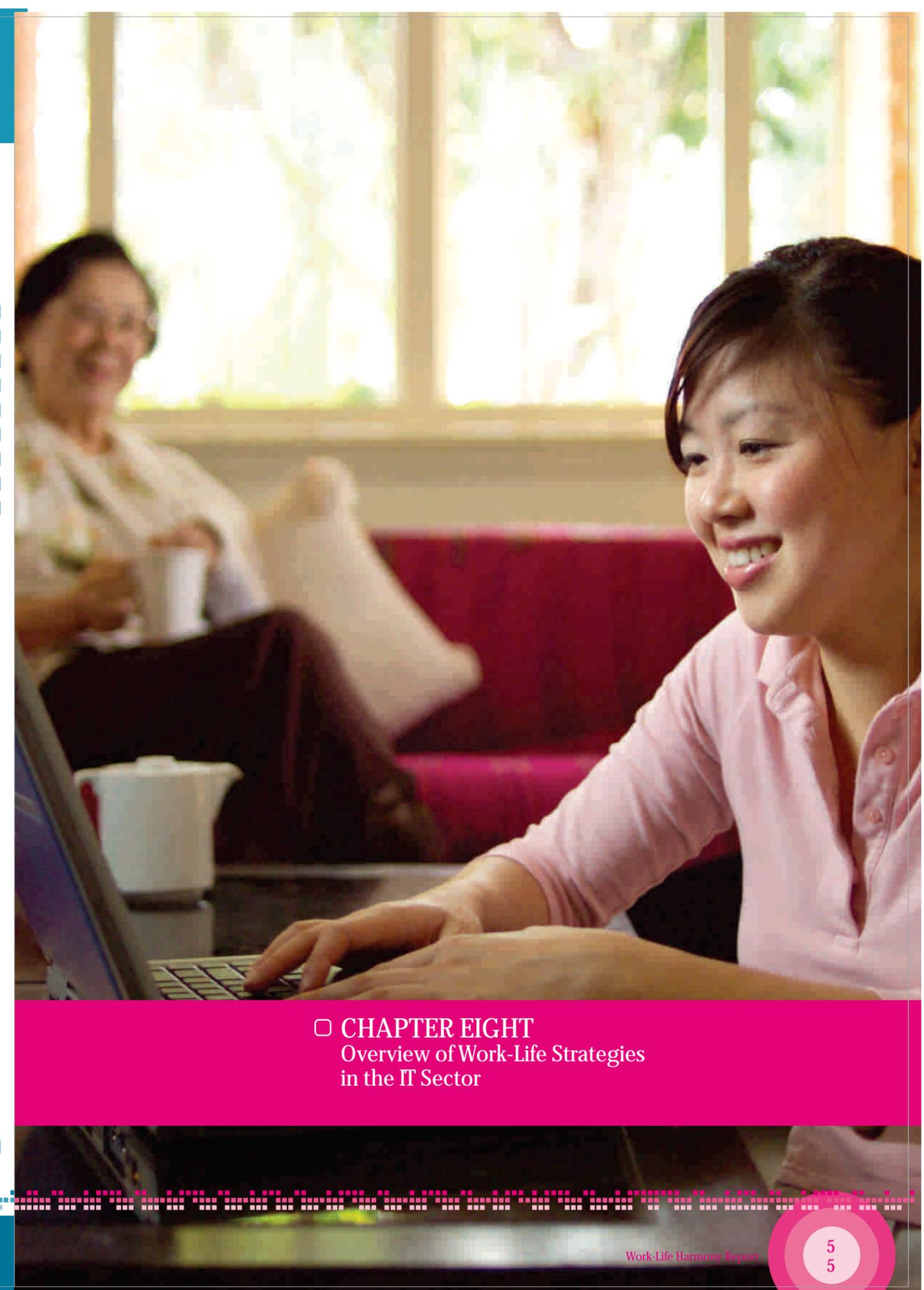
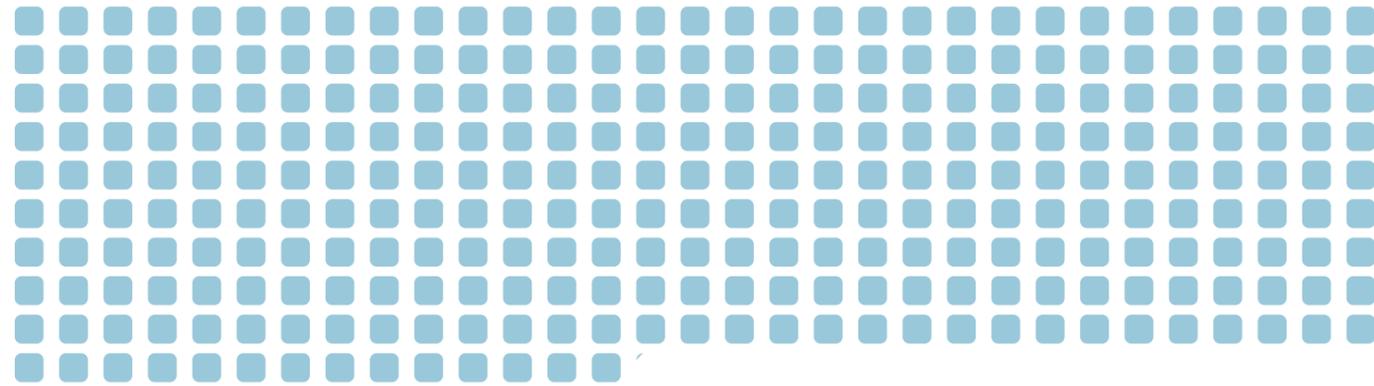
Evaluating work-life programmes

Hospitals evaluate their work-life programmes by tracking employee satisfaction through both ad-hoc and regular surveys and feedback forums. Turnover is a commonly used indicator as it is quantifiable and easily monitored. Medical leave rates (KKH and Parkway Group) and staff medical expenses (CGH) are other measures hospitals have used to assess the impact of their work-life programmes. Although it can be difficult to isolate and credit changes in such parameters to a single item such as Work-Life Strategy, tracking them provides long term information and reveals trends that can be encouraged or nipped in the bud.

Going forward

Over the years, the healthcare sector in Singapore has constantly faced manpower challenges, both in recruiting and retaining trained personnel, as well as in keeping its employees effective in a difficult working environment. With local demand for healthcare services and foreign competition for healthcare workers both increasing, it is very important for the hospitals in Singapore to sustain and enhance their work-life offerings. This will help to attract and retain a new generation of young employees with different expectations and aspirations from their predecessors.

Going forward, drawing on the experience of those institutions that had made an early start, local hospitals are well placed to share best practices in implementing good work-life practices for the benefit of the whole sector. Already, the public healthcare clusters are tapping on their more advanced members to disseminate and increase the penetration of Work-Life Strategy within their groups.



□ CHAPTER EIGHT
Overview of Work-Life Strategies
in the IT Sector

The Infocomm Technology (IT) sector is an important one in Singapore. In 2002, it accounted for some 6% of GDP and employed roughly 5% of the total labour force.¹ The sector is expected to grow by 7% in 2005² and continue to be an engine of growth for Singapore.

This chapter will

- highlight the pertinent Work-Life Strategy issues in the IT sector, and
- explore how some IT companies in Singapore are implementing Work-Life Strategy.

Work-Life Strategy issues

A career in IT is one of the most exciting and most challenging paths to take. Working in a fast-changing environment, IT professionals are in a never-ending marathon characterised by back-to-back 100-meter sprints. The ubiquity of IT also blurs the boundary between work and personal/family life. Facilitated by a connected mobile device and broadband access, employees have a tendency to be sucked into a “long hours work culture”, particularly those in multinational companies who work across time zones. It is no surprise that employees in the sector are prone to burnout.

IT sector employees are generally highly qualified – eight in 10 have tertiary education. Companies compete fiercely for this talent, and it is not uncommon for employees in the IT sector to switch employers for more lucrative offers. Despite the considerable compensation and benefits, the sector has become less attractive to new hires.

Recognising that offering increasing compensation packages may not be a sustainable recruiting strategy, many companies in the sector are implementing Work-Life Strategy.

How do IT companies implement Work-Life Strategy?

To get an idea of how Work-Life Strategy is implemented in the IT sector, in-depth interviews were conducted among several prominent Singapore-based IT companies.

In addition, 23 IT companies in Singapore were surveyed on their work-life practices. The survey found that about 40% of the companies provided infrastructure that support a work-life culture. The survey also revealed that the most popular flexible work arrangements among the companies were:

- Flexible start and end times (80% of the companies made this option available to employees)
- Part-time work (50%)
- Flexi-place/telecommuting (65%)

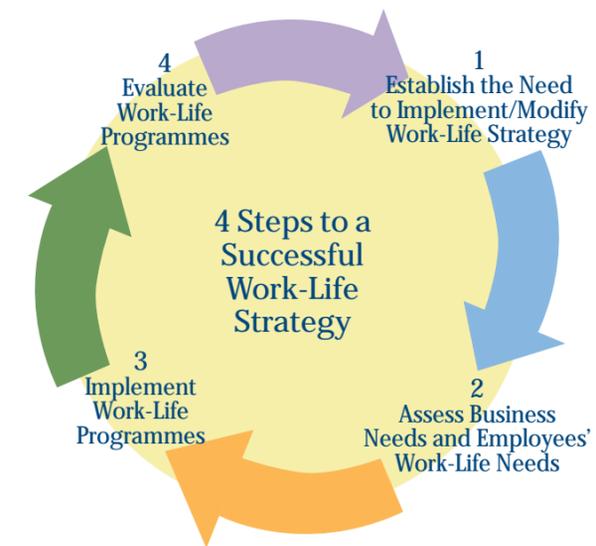
¹ 'Country Report 2004', Singapore Infocomm Technology Federation, available: <http://www.sitf.org.sg>
² Annual Survey on Infocomm Industry 2003, Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore, available: <http://www.ida.gov.sg/idaweb/doc/download/13073/InfocommIndustry2003Summaryv2.doc>

The following table summarises the leave benefits offered by the surveyed companies.

Figure 9.1: Summary of leave benefits (non-statutory) in the IT sector

Type of leave benefit	Average maximum number of days	Highest number of days offered
Childcare/elder-care sick leave	6	14
Compassionate leave	3	6
Marriage leave	4	6
Paternity leave	3	6
Urgent leave/unrecorded time-off for family/personal matters	Supervisor's discretion	Supervisor's discretion
Other forms of leave benefit	Typical allotment	
Adoption leave	4 weeks	
Leave of absence	Up to 2 years	
Unpaid time-off	Up to 20 days	

The information in this section is organised according to the diagram below.



Establishing a need to implement Work-Life Strategy

Combating burnout to retain talent

Many IT companies have learnt that overloading their employees' work lives will only cause them to burn out and the organisation to lose talented people. Taking advantage of the advanced technology at their disposal, companies in this sector often offer them great control over how they work.

For example, IBM recognises that employees have varied needs and preferences on where and how they best work. The company, which has offices in over 75 countries all around the world, is a leader in implementing global programmes to address employees' dependent-care needs.

Microsoft relies on a culture of results-driven flexibility – employees are encouraged to work flexibly so long as they are productive and meet business targets.

Assessing business needs and employees' work-life needs

Business needs

Because many of their business activities are conducted away from the traditional workplace, IT companies generally define their business needs in terms of service standards and sales targets that teleworking employees must attain. These standards and targets form an outcome-based performance management system through which teleworkers can be evaluated.

Employees' work-life needs

Like other organisations that successfully implement work-life programmes, IT companies generally assess their employees' work-life needs through surveys and workforce profiling. Microsoft and NCS, for example, conduct annual employee opinion surveys covering work-life needs and other topics.

When developing a Work-Life Strategy, it is necessary to assess the unique work-life needs of one's employees. For a corporation like IBM, with employees spread over 75 different countries, this loomed as a huge task. IBM tackled it by conducting a global work-life survey translated into 20 languages. The survey findings, which covered diverse work-life needs and issues, built the foundation for IBM's global HR strategy to increase morale, productivity and loyalty and reduce absenteeism. The global HR strategy was in turn customised to local populations, business needs and priorities.

In 2000, as part of this global effort, IBM launched a US\$50 million Global Work-Life Fund dedicated to dependent care programmes for IBMers worldwide.

Implementing work-life programmes

Support for an open, flexible work culture

Companies in the IT sector typically have access to technology (e.g. broadband access, email and secure remote access to the corporate network) that makes it possible for employees to be productive while teleworking. However, technology needs to be supported by a positive workplace culture for flexible work to be a success.

At Microsoft, managers undergo training on respecting and accommodating employees' personal needs as far as possible. Employees regularly update a commonly accessible calendar to inform colleagues of their work schedules. In fact, team members are often empowered to fix appointments for one another via the calendaring system. To further perpetuate a culture that fosters good management, Microsoft managers receive feedback from their staff through the Manager Feedback Survey twice a year. The survey covers people management skills as well as performance with regard to bottom-line results. In addition, the annual organisational health index survey has a key section devoted to Work-Life Harmony issues.

Training and tools

For work-life programmes to permeate a large organisation, senior management support is but a starting point. Employees – especially middle managers – have to be equipped with the skills and competencies to manage work-life issues within the parameters of the organisation's Work-Life Strategy. Many IT companies in Singapore see Work-Life Strategy as an important enough issue to invest in training its managers and developing tools to facilitate their work-life programmes.

New Microsoft managers undergo training in relevant people skills. They also hold mandatory one-on-one meetings with employees to discuss performance-related and work-life issues.

Sun Microsystems provide a range of tools to help managers evaluate employees' fit for certain levels of flexibility. There is even a self-assessment tool for employees to determine their own suitability for working flexibly. These tools are all available online, along with related work-life policies and guidelines.

iWork@Sun: Piloting a comprehensive flexi-place scheme

What is iWork@Sun?

Under the iWork@Sun programme, employees at Sun Microsystems' Singapore offices benefit from flexible work practices. Utilising Sun's technology, the office environment is flexible, revolving around "SunRay machines", located at every desk in Sun's two offices (at Chai Chee and Central Mall) and meeting rooms. Sun employees can use their personal token to log onto any SunRay and immediately be able to access their personal documents and shared data. They are also able to carry on where they left off at a previous session on another SunRay. Within the iWork@Sun programme, employees are also able to consider work from home options. In Singapore, a 3-month pilot involving 38 employees working from home between 3-5 days a week was recently introduced.

Why iWork@Sun?

Looking at Sun's workforce profile, close to 80% of its Singapore employees are married. Sun saw a need to implement iWork@Sun to

- support a mobile workforce with choice and flexibility; and
 - increase Sun's ability to attract and retain global talent.
- Sun's vision of "Working Anywhere, Anytime and on Any Device" involves employees staying productive and effective while improving their Work-Life Harmony.

How flexible?

Generally, Sun employees work with varying degrees of flexibility, depending on their job scope. Some may be almost desk-bound, while others may only come into the office a few times a month. Sun has a self-assessment tool to help employees decide if their personality and job characteristics are suitable for different levels of flexibility.

Flexi-teamwork

Under the iWork@Sun programme, Sun's office space is flexible. When working in the office, employees access an on-line system to book a workspace for the required duration. In addition to displaying booking information, the system also indicates which colleagues have booked which SunRay stations, allowing team members to plan to work nearby one another.

Clarifying doubts from senior management and participants

The recent work from home pilot started with a senior management session attended by all business heads, where policies, guidelines and operational details were clarified. Once the programme was endorsed, employees participating in the pilot, attended a Q&A session and were given a cash allowance to set up their home office. (Sun also reimburses all broadband connection costs and IDD calls.)

Monitoring and evaluating the pilot

Throughout the pilot, the project team organised training and feedback sessions with pilot participants to monitor the situation and help fine-tune specific elements of the programme. Feedback was also sought through ongoing surveys, which included specific questions about the programme – findings from these questions helped to evaluate the pilot.

How Sun benefited

At a global level in 2004, Sun Microsystems saw 34% productivity gains and 73% positive employee satisfaction following the introduction of its flexible working programme. In addition, Sun saved 6900 seats, reducing real estate costs.

iWork@Sun – "the best of both worlds"

Senior marketing manager Genevieve Yeep still telecommutes two or three days a week. Genevieve is part of a global team with peers in Munich, Paris, Japan and Korea, with her direct supervisor located in Los Angeles. Her job requires her to take weekly calls with her team usually late at night.

Genevieve says, "iWork@Sun has provided me with an environment where I enjoy the best of both worlds. I can continue to hold a full-time job and contribute to active employment, while meeting the needs and demands of bringing up two young children."

Family childcare network

IBM recently introduced an innovative child-minding arrangement for working mothers with young children between 0 to 2 years of age. IBMers' family and friends aged 30 to 55 who are experienced in raising children and who are interested in providing care for young children in their homes are given priority to receive training in health, safety and child development. Home visits will be conducted to ensure what is learnt is implemented.

In addition, this group of caregivers will receive financial grants to purchase childcare equipment and materials. They will also be assessed, monitored and evaluated regularly. Each caregiver agrees to care for at least 2 unrelated children, and IBMers' children will be given priority.

Health and wellness programmes

Health and wellness programmes are also common in the stressful IT sector. NCS, for example, run activities such as "Fruity Day", when employees can pick and choose from a smorgasbord of fruits at lunchtime. Employees can also choose to go on a diet plan, dished out especially for them from their on-site café⁹. HR also plans lunchtime talks on topics such as marriage counselling, child training and interest groups like art and photography, just to name a few. NCS employees say it certainly helps to have a CEO who fully endorses and actively participates in work-life programmes.

Flexible benefits

Flexibility benefits have become popular in the IT sector, as the scheme allows employees to tailor their benefits to their different needs and preferences. In this way, companies' investments in such benefits are maximised.

The benefits programme at Sun Microsystems is designed to support an employee's health, well-being and lifestyle. The flexible approach enables employees to design their annual benefits to suit their individual needs, and covers fitness club membership, childcare centre costs and parents' medical care, amongst others.

Evaluating work-life programmes

Many of the IT companies interviewed used surveys to evaluate the work-life programmes they implement. As some of the pioneer implementers in Singapore (especially of flexi-place arrangements), they have had a chance to see how Work-Life Strategy benefits their business.

Since it implemented work-life programmes, NCS has seen increased employee satisfaction, commitment and loyalty. With the implementation of its office mobility programme, IBM Singapore saw increased employee satisfaction and saved significant costs related to office space and design/construction.

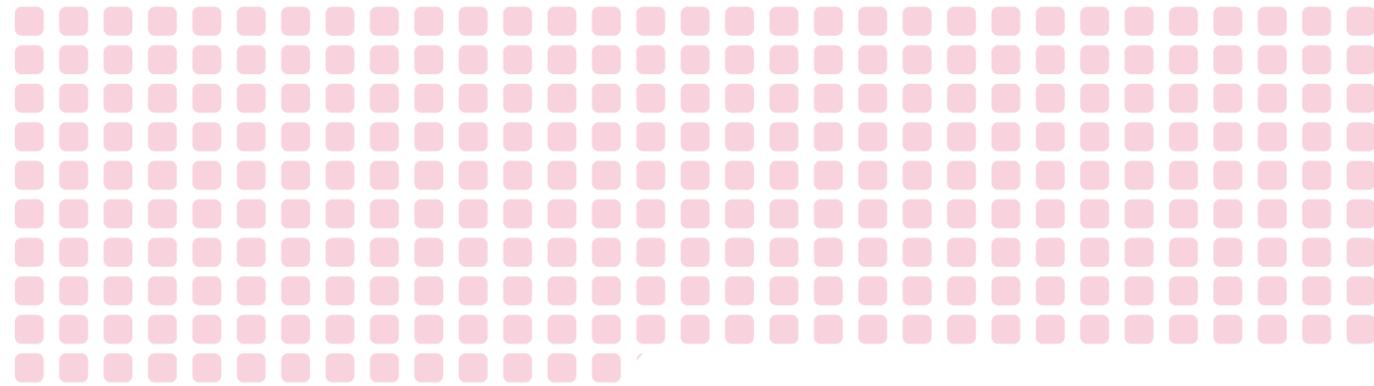
Going forward

According to Darwin's theory of evolution, in nature, it is not the strongest species that survives but the most adaptable. The same can be said for the IT industry, which is an environment characterised by unending and rapid changes and competition for scarce resources. Instead of financial capital, the IT industry is primarily dependent on human talent for success, so best practice IT companies are evolving fast to make sure that they have the best environment for their employees. In Singapore, the multinationals seem to have adapted the fastest, partly because they generally adopt best practices from their offices in countries where Work-Life Strategy is more mature.

Work-Life Harmony features predominantly in attracting and retaining staff. The nature of jobs in the industry – many of which do not require an employee to be tethered to a desk to be productive – and a highly educated and tech-savvy workforce combine to offer more work-life options than other comparable professions. Generally, many IT companies have fairly open policies, focusing on deliverables and output rather than where (or when) work is done.

The survey results do confirm that the IT sector is on the right path. However, there is still room for improvement. The industry's policies are still not as conducive to Work-Life Harmony as the best of the West. For example, while the best paternity leave offered locally was six days, it is common in the US for new fathers to be granted a month off.

The IT sector workgroup did observe that while the framework for promoting Work-Life Harmony is there, many employees have yet to fully take advantage of it. Managers must walk the talk and be sincere in how they approach this very important subject. Employees must be comfortable that there will be no repercussions if they exercise their entitlements and/or privileges. There is a culture to change and it will take time. Working through the Singapore Infocomm Technology Federation and the sector's HR groups to educate, reinforce and share best practices with companies in the sector, the workgroup is hopeful that it can make the IT sector a better place to work.



□ CHAPTER NINE
Overview of Work-Life Strategies
in SMEs

Nine in 10 companies in Singapore are classified as small and medium enterprises (SMEs).¹ Taken as a whole, SMEs employ up to half of Singapore's workforce. Although SMEs are very diverse, they represent an important segment of employers with their own unique work-life challenges due to their individual small workforces.

This chapter will

- highlight the Work-Life Strategy issues in SMEs, and
- explore how some local SMEs are implementing Work-Life Strategy.

Work-Life Strategy issues

The majority of SMEs do not have a Work-Life Strategy. There are many reasons for this:

- SMEs may not be aware of Work-Life Strategy and its benefits.
- SMEs may not have HR or work-life expertise.
- HR personnel at SMEs tend to multitask, and do finance and administrative work in addition to their HR duties.
- SMEs are concerned about survival, and see Work Life Strategy as a non-essential luxury.

SMEs that do implement Work-Life Strategy tend to go through the 4-step process (see diagram below) as well. However, the Work-Life Strategy implemented by SMEs tends to depend on a flexible, supportive employee-friendly culture that originates from the CEO, rather than formal policies and guidelines. Due to their smaller staff strength, SMEs can also assess employee needs more readily and adjust their work-life programmes on the fly.



¹ SPRING Singapore's definition of SMEs:

- Local SMEs – enterprises with at least 30% local ownership and net fixed assets below \$15 million (for manufacturing) and employment size below 200 (for services)
- Foreign SMEs – enterprises with less than 30% local ownership and net fixed assets below \$15 million (for manufacturing) and employment size below 200 (for services)

How do SMEs implement Work-Life Strategy?

To find out how Work-Life Strategies were implemented in this diverse sector, HR decision-makers at four SMEs were interviewed. The SMEs were

- **Apex-Pal International Ltd** – Apex-Pal is a leading food and beverage group with about 650 full-time and part-time employees. The group comprises well-known home-grown brands Sakae Sushi, Crepes & Cream, Hibiki, Skäl and Uma Uma Men.
- **Jason Electronics (Pte) Ltd** – Jason Electronics provides solutions in marine electronics, land telecommunications etc. for the shipping and offshore/onshore industries. It employs about 90 staff.
- **SP Consulting (International) Pte Ltd** – SP Consulting provides management system consultancy and training. It has 12 employees.
- **Stamford Law Corporation** – Stamford Law is a legal corporate firm with about 45 employees in its Singapore office. The firm focuses on mergers and acquisitions, corporate finance and capital markets-related work.

What follows are snippets about how these SMEs implement Work-Life Strategy.

CEO Drives Work-Life Culture at APEX-PAL

Work-Life Strategy as business strategy from day one

May Foo, Vice President of HR at Apex-Pal, attributes the work-life culture at the food and beverage company to CEO Douglas Foo. Douglas has been an approachable boss who believes that addressing employees' work-life needs is a sound business strategy since day one, May relates. Apex-Pal's business processes are all aligned to Work-Life Strategy. An annual employee opinion survey collects information on work-life issues and allows the company to prioritise its Work-Life Strategy.

She adds that Apex-Pal managers also adopt a similar attitude toward work-life issues, following Douglas' example.

Family-oriented work-life programmes

Apex-Pal's work-life programmes – like those of many SMEs – are family-oriented. One example is the bursaries employees' children get for excelling in their studies. These bursaries provide welcome financial assistance to employees, and signal that the company recognises the importance of education for their children.

Another is the annual family day, which includes kitchen tours in Apex-Pal restaurants, a good example of an activity incurring marginal costs and yet appreciated by parents and their curious charges.

Apex-Pal also places an emphasis on employee health in its work-life programmes, holding bowling tournaments and quarterly walk-a-jogs.

Apart from these, Apex-Pal has a wide range of leave benefits, including paid leave for elder care, marriage leave and paternity leave.

Part-time arrangement eases peak-hour loads

In line with most food and beverage companies, Apex-Pal's outlets practise part-time work. Part-timers – usually students and mothers with family care needs – indicate the hours during which they are available for work, and management schedules them accordingly. Expanding on this, Apex-Pal maintains a core database of part-timers specifically for supplementing restaurant crews at peak hours.

Work-life programmes communicated to new recruits

Apex-Pal's HR personnel conduct orientation briefings to ensure new employees are aware of the company's various work-life programmes and policies. The company also updates employees about new programmes through memos and circulars as well as quarterly communication sessions.

To ensure the effectiveness of its communications, corporate personnel conduct random checks on awareness and understanding of its programmes.

Higher job satisfaction

Employees at Apex-Pal experience reduced work stress and higher job satisfaction, according to in-house surveys. Costs related to medical leave and absenteeism are low.

In 2004, Apex-Pal won the Singapore Family Friendly Employer Award.

“Work-Life Strategy has definitely contributed to Apex-Pal’s business performance. We can see it from our employees’ enthusiasm, their engagement at work, their commitment to the company. Without Work-Life Strategy, we would most probably not have developed as well and as quickly as we did.”

May Foo
Vice President of HR
Apex-Pal International

Jason’s Trusted, Valued Employees

At Jason Electronics, management wants their employees to know they are valued members of the company.

Learning what different employees need

As a maritime equipment distributor, retailer and service-provider, Jason Electronics employs a diverse workforce. Technical support staff, whose jobs involve servicing ships and are physically demanding, make up one main group. Another large group is the sales and backroom staff, who hold office-based jobs.

Learning about the work-life needs of two such different groups of employees can be challenging. Jason Electronics’ management invests considerable time in monthly management-employee meetings. These meetings are well attended and provide valuable feedback that helps HR to identify issues on the ground.

Recent meetings saw a recurring theme: the 5-day work week. Many employees felt that working slightly longer hours every day during a 5-day work week would be more productive than working a half-day on Saturdays. They also expressed said that a 5-day work week would help reduce their travelling expenses. In response to these views, Jason Electronics is considering piloting a 5-day work week with its support staff, before rolling it out more widely if the pilot succeeds.

A culture of trust and accountability

Jason Electronics’ Work-Life Strategy is supported by a culture of trust. For example, as they are always on the move, the company’s sales staff have the flexibility to work away from the office, depending on their schedule. The company knows employees find this flexibility empowering and see it as a sign of management’s trust in them. A target-based performance management system helps Jason Electronics monitor these employees’ productivity and ensures they remain accountable for those targets.

Jason Electronics’ trust in its employees is also demonstrated by some generous benefits. One example is that the company reimburses employees up to \$30 every time they visit the doctor, with no cap on the number of visits. Another example is family care leave: there is no cap to the number of days of leave an employee can take annually; the only restriction is that an employee cannot take more than 2 days in a stretch. For employees who have family care needs for an extended time, the company provides up to 2 weeks’ paid leave.

To ensure the benefits of its work-life programmes are maximised, Jason Electronics’ HR personnel conduct orientation briefings to introduce the company’s work-life policies to new employees. A copy of the staff handbook is also available on the company Intranet.

Jason Electronics’ Work-Life Strategy won it the 2004 Singapore Family Friendly Employer Certificate of Merit.

Valued employees reciprocate

Perhaps the most important benefits Jason Electronics reaps from its work-life programmes are the accumulated efforts of appreciative employees who want to give something back to the company. Jody Chua, a Sales Coordinator at the company, is one appreciative staff. Jody was granted extended maternity leave of 4 additional months at 50% of her last drawn pay to care for her third child, another sign of the employee-friendly culture at Jason Electronics.

“It’s touching to know that my bosses care,” said Jody, adding, “I will always try to apply for my own annual leave in advance [to make it easier to arrange for coverage of duties].”

Telecommuting Suits SP

SP Consulting, a small management consulting firm of 13 employees, was probably one of the first SMEs in Singapore to implement Work-Life Strategy in a structured manner. It was the only SME winner of the Singapore Family Friendly Employer Award in 2002, and won the award again in 2004.

Identify key issues to tackle

Before developing its Work-Life Strategy, SP Consulting identified the key issues it wanted to address:

- Employee turnover
- Employee productivity
- Employee’s ability to cope with stress
- Operational overheads

With these issues in mind, SP Consulting focused on work-life programmes that could return value to the company.

Telecommuting addressed business needs

Telecommuting was a case in point. Working on the go had its attractions for SP Consulting, since the company’s business model already involved its consultants meeting and serving clients away from the office.

The decision was made for consultants to telecommute and choose essentially where and when they worked. Slowly, the infrastructure facilitating remote access was set up, partially subsidised by the WoW! Fund from the Ministry of Manpower.

Flexitime extended operating hours

SP Consulting also introduced other work-life programmes that directly addressed the issues it had identified. A flexi-time scheme was instituted for administrative staff, who chose different regular start and end times. This had the effect of extending SP Consulting’s operating hours without incurring extra salary costs.

SP Consulting also implemented paid insurance for employees’ non-working spouses.

Benefits realised

As telecommuting became increasingly a way of work, SP Consulting’s directors realised that office space did not have to be set aside for every consultant. Costs related to fixed assets were reduced, and office space was better utilised. A meeting room was converted to a family room, for example, where employees could bring their children if childcare arrangements failed and employees needed to be in the office.

By focusing on work-life programmes that directly addressed the issues it had earlier identified, SP Consulting has been able to retain and motivate its employees. The result is an enthusiastic service mentality and increased productivity. Director Benson Leong remarked that SP Consulting’s work-life programmes have created “a sense of corporate responsibility and bonding, to the extent that [employees] are willing to sacrifice for the company during bad times.”

Laying Down the Law to Turnover

Building a core of talent in a turnover-prone industry

The legal profession is known for its high turnover, as lawyers often leave for less stressful and still lucrative positions. When Stamford Law was established in 2000, its management realised that to attract and retain a core of talented and motivated lawyers, it had to address the issue of “burnout”. Stamford Law’s solution was to develop policies and programmes to perpetuate a culture that supported employees’ Work-Life Harmony.

This became a more pressing issue recently when Stamford Law studied its workforce profile and found that

- more than 60% of its 43 employees were aged 25-35;
- more than half were married; and
- more than a third were married with children below 6 years of age.

In addition, its annual Healthy Lifestyle survey saw a significant number of employees raise Work-Life Harmony concerns, especially about long hours spent “desk-bound” in the office.

Looking at these findings, Stamford Law saw that in order to sustain the firm’s productivity and competitive edge, it needed to address employees’ Work-Life Harmony more proactively. To this end, it implemented several innovative work-life programmes, including “Bring Your Kids to Work Day”, on which employees could bring their children to work, so they could understand their parents’ jobs better. This event was much appreciated by Stamford Law employees and garnered a lot of favourable press coverage for the firm.

Accessing emails on the go = Berry efficient

In late 2004, to address issues via its Healthy Lifestyle survey and workforce profiling, Stamford Law started to explore setting up a Blackberry system and equipping the firm's lawyers with PDAs. The lawyers would then be able to access their company email accounts through their PDAs.

To supplement this flexi-place policy, the firm would also install document-management software to enable employees to access and collaborate on confidential company files.

Another survey was rolled out to gauge employees' reaction to the plans. Initially, relates Yap Wai Ming, a director at Stamford Law, there were fears that being so accessible would mean employees had even worse Work-Life Harmony. The firm decided to pilot the Blackberry system with volunteers before rolling it out further.

As it turned out, those fears were largely unfounded. Employees accessed their emails during pockets of free time while waiting for meetings to start or while travelling, for instance. In this way, they made full use of working hours that would otherwise be wasted. Clients were soon complimenting the firm for its responsive service.

Making choices

Employees also made their own choices about whether to access their emails after official working hours. Often, it was a matter of one's own priorities – when there was an important trans-national merger to negotiate and time was of the essence, employees might choose to be accessible and responsive around the clock; when family emergencies occurred, these took precedence.

The ability to access emails from their PDAs gave Stamford Law employees great control and flexibility to adjust how they managed their work responsibilities and personal needs. This allowed them to react to changing priorities in their lives.

Going forward

SMEs face increasing competition. Many employees in SMEs are forced to work harder and longer to help their companies survive, and this presents an even greater work-life challenge. The CEOs of the forward-looking SMEs featured here seem to have grasped this. They all take the long-term view that to sustain growth, having a stable core of committed employees is of paramount importance. These CEOs have used Work-Life Strategy as a business tool to help them create this core of committed employees.

Going forward, to enable more SMEs to take advantage of Work-Life Strategy as a business tool, the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises will work with the Ministry of Manpower to equip SMEs with information and skills that would help SMEs of different sizes to

- assess their business needs and employees' work-life needs;
- adapt best practices to suit their organisations;
- develop and implement low/no-cost work-life programmes suitable for the different functional areas within their organisations; and
- equip their employees from different functional areas with adequate knowledge on work-life programmes so that employees can contribute to the design of work-life options as well.

A "Do It Yourself" work-life manual tailored for SMEs could also be developed.



CHAPTER TEN Conclusion and What's Next

Work-Life Strategy is important

Work-Life Strategy is important for Singapore companies because of two main reasons. First, human capital has emerged as a key asset that can make an organisation stand out from its competitors. Next, demographic and attitudinal changes in our workforce mean that today's workers have different needs and expectations from their predecessors. To sustain productivity and remain competitive, companies have to be able to attract and retain talent, and to do this, an effective Work-Life Strategy is crucial.

What is true for companies in Singapore is true for Singapore as a country as well. Work-Life Strategy can help Singapore attract and retain the best talent as global competition for human capital intensifies.

There is room for improvement

We have seen in this report a promising snapshot of the Work-Life Strategies that best practice companies in Singapore implement. However, compared to other developed countries, there is much room for improvement.

The percentage of employees on flexible work arrangements is a good indicator of how advanced Work-Life Strategy is in a country – flexible work arrangements are generally considered to be the most impactful work-life programmes. Although factors other than Work-Life Strategy may be responsible for Singapore lagging behind these countries, the large gap between Singapore¹ and other countries is worrying and shows just how far we have to go.

Figure 10.1: Percentage of workforce on flexi-time

US ²	1991	1997	2001	Figures not available
	15.0%	27.6%	28.8%	
Singapore	Figures not available	1998	2002	2004
		0.6%	0.2%	0.3%

Figure 10.2: Percentage of workforce who telework³

	2000	2002	2004
Singapore	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%
UK	10%		
Finland	8%		
Denmark	6%		
Netherlands	7%		
France	4%		
Sweden	5%		
Italy	4%		
Ireland	2%		

¹ Singapore statistics from 'Conditions of Employment 2004', Ministry of Manpower, 2005

² US Department of Labor, accessed 29 June 2005 at: <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/flex.nr0.htm>

³ Other countries' statistics from 'Third European Survey on Working Conditions', European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2001

Figure 10.3: Percentage of workforce who worked part-time⁴ (2004)

Singapore	6%
UK	25%
US	22%

Going forward - recommendation

To ensure that as many Singapore companies benefit from Work-Life Strategy as possible, the Champions Group recommends that:

1. **The Tripartite Committee on Work-Life Strategy is in a good position to add to the body of knowledge about Work-Life Strategy in Singapore and facilitate information flow.**

There is a need for an organisation in Singapore that champions Work-Life Strategy and adds to the body of knowledge about Work-Life Strategy. The Tripartite Committee on Work-Life Strategy (TriCom) drives the promotion of Work-Life Harmony in Singapore, and is therefore in a good position to collate and disseminate such knowledge (e.g. international best practices, work-life events and forums) to appropriate local stakeholders. The TriCom could also work with local and overseas institutions to collect and direct work-life research that benefits Singapore companies. The TriCom could then facilitate the dissemination of resultant research findings.

2. **The Employer Alliance has an important role to play in promoting Work-Life Strategy, CEO to CEO.**

The Champions Group was set up in October 2004. The objectives for its one-year term include

- Recommending suitable work-life programmes for Singapore companies; and
- Guiding the implementation of these work-life programmes.

The Champions Group has found that it is effective for CEOs to drive this effort as they ultimately decide whether Work-Life Strategy is implemented and thrives in a company. There is a need for a permanent organisation to continue the work of the Champions Group and to interest the industrial associations and HR groups to continue the promotion and implementation of Work-Life Strategy.

The Employer Alliance comprises CEOs of best practice companies. As leaders of companies that walk the talk when it comes to Work-Life Strategy, they are uniquely qualified to persuade CEOs and other stakeholders that Work-Life Strategy is a business imperative. It is therefore suggested that the Employer Alliance continue this critical role that the Champions Group has initiated.

3. **Industry associations, HR groups and unions have an important role to play in promoting Work-Life Strategy.**

To ensure more companies in Singapore are aware of and benefit from Work-Life Strategy, industry associations (e.g. Association of Banks in Singapore, Association of Small and Medium Enterprises, Singapore Infocomm Technology Federation, Singapore National Employers Federation), unions along with formal and informal HR groups in various sectors (e.g. Singapore Human Resources Institute, SAKRA HR group) have an important role to play.

As this report shows, Work-Life Strategy is an imperative not just for individual companies, but also for sectors as a whole. Members of individual unions, industry associations and HR groups share common business concerns, and are therefore well positioned to organise and coordinate educational efforts to promote Work-Life Strategy, as well as share best practices and information on upcoming activities.

⁴ UK statistic derived from UK Department of Trade and Industry at <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nscl.asp?ID=6600>; US statistic derived from US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics at <http://www.bls.gov/bls/topicsaz.htm> (2004)

4. Employers should learn from other sectors.

Although Work-Life Strategies differ sector by sector, there are some similarities among sectors as well. One observation that the Champions Group gleaned from this exercise is that the design of Work-Life Strategies may depend as much on the nature of a job as it does on the sector. Therefore, in addition to learning within their own sectors, employers should learn from other sectors. For example, since both healthcare and manufacturing involve 24-hour operations where employees need to be physically present, it is possible that practices in hospitals could be applied in manufacturing businesses, and vice versa.

5. An easily accessible, one-stop information resource should be set up to assist and guide employers that want to develop, implement and improve their Work-Life Strategies.

To facilitate employers to start or further develop their Work-Life Strategies, the Ministry of Manpower should make knowledge on Work-Life Strategy available on an easily accessible, one-stop information resource. This will serve as a central dissemination point for upcoming activities, best practices, implementation tips and research findings, culled from local and international sources.

As for the particular sectors,

<p>The banking sector will promote the implementation of work-life practices through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> organising forums on related topics such as change management; active participation in Work-Life Harmony Week; and bringing in overseas counterparts to share experiences and international best practices. <p>The Association of Banks in Singapore (ABS), which represents the local banking community, set up a Task Force on Work-Life Practices in early 2005 to coordinate these initiatives. Task Force members have committed to striving to attain the Work-Life Excellence Award.</p>
<p>The chemical sector will work through industry associations and HR groups to promote the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listening effectively to employees – because employees know the ground and therefore provide the most useful feedback. Proactively looking at trends, especially workforce profile – because workforce profile and employee needs can change rapidly. Proactively identify opportunities to implement work-life programmes – because opportunities to develop and implement work-life programmes in companies come and go.
<p>The healthcare sector will draw on the experience of those institutions that had made an early start to share best practices in implementing good work-life practices for the benefit of the whole sector. Already, the public healthcare clusters are tapping on their more advanced members to disseminate and increase the penetration of Work-Life Strategy within their groups.</p>
<p>The IT sector has identified that workplace culture should be addressed, as not many employees take advantage of available work-life programmes. It will work through the Singapore Infocomm Technology Federation and the sector's HR groups to educate and share best practices with companies in the sector, with the aim of making the IT sector a better place to work.</p>
<p>To enable more SMEs to take advantage of Work-Life Strategy as a business tool, the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises will work with the Ministry of Manpower to equip SMEs with information and skills that would help SMEs of different sizes to implement effective Work-Life Strategies. A "Do It Yourself" work-life manual tailored for SMEs could also be developed.</p>

For individual companies, the next step forward would depend on what stage you are at.

If you...	Consider... (the suggestion are not mutually exclusive)
are new to Work-Life Strategy and not very convinced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> visiting www.greatworkplace.com.sg for more evidence and information on Work Life Strategy. attending one of the monthly WoW! Fund briefings at the Ministry of Manpower. (Funding of up to \$30,000 per employer is available on application – see Annex A.)
have started a Work-Life Strategy and implemented some work-life programmes but are open to learning and doing more	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> conducting a needs assessment and evaluating your workforce profile. if necessary, engaging a work-life consultant to study your company and offer recommendations. A list of trained work-life consultants is at Annex B. talking with your union representative to discuss possible priority areas and work-life options.
have a developed Work-Life Strategy with advanced work-life programmes and a supportive, flexible culture already in place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> measuring and evaluating the outcome of your current work-life programmes. benchmarking against best practices locally and internationally. One way of doing this is to apply for the biennial Work-Life Excellence Award. joining the Employer Alliance in promoting implementation of Work-Life Strategy.

Annex A

WORK-LIFE WORKS! FUND (WoW! Fund)

The \$10 million WoW! Fund facilitates the development and implementation of Work-Life Strategy.

Which organisations are eligible?

All private-sector organisations, including non-profit organisations, regardless of size and industry, can apply for the grant.

How does it work?

The Government will co-fund up to 70% of costs incurred for approved projects, subject to a cap of \$30,000 per organisation. The WoW! Fund covers:

- Training of HR managers and line supervisors on how to implement Work-Life Strategies, including training to develop good HR management systems. Training courses must be approved by MOM;
- On a case-by-case basis, one-time infrastructural costs in implementing flexible work arrangements and selected employee support schemes that contribute towards care of dependants;
- Engaging a qualified work-life consultant (list at Annex B); and
- Employing or deploying staff to drive implementation of Work-Life Strategy within the organisation.
Note that only trained staff will be supported.

Funding for (c) and (d) is further capped at \$10,000 within the overall cap. There is also a cap of \$2,000 per month for (d).

Higher priority will be given to projects to introduce flexible work arrangements, as this has long-term benefits to facilitate the workforce to achieve better Work-Life Harmony.

Projects should be completed within one year.

How will the grant be disbursed?

The grant will be disbursed in two phases:

- First 30% of approved grant will be disbursed within one month after approval of project.
- Remaining portion of approved grant will be disbursed upon completion of project and submission of final report and claims.

How to Apply?

Organisations must complete the official application form (found on www.greatworkplace.com.sg) and submit this together with a work-life project proposal. Approval for the project must be obtained before starting.

Other Conditions

Successful applicants are required to submit a progress report at the mid-point of the project. Upon completion of the project, a final report and all receipts/invoices for claims should be submitted to MOM. Successful applicants are required to participate in the next Work-Life Excellence Award and share their experience and best practices. MOM also reserves the right to audit successful applicants at random to ensure that the grant is used appropriately.

Where can I find out more?

Those interested in findings out more about the WoW! Fund can

- Go to www.greatworkplace.com.sg;
- Attend information sessions held on the first working Monday of each month at 4 pm at MOM Building. Please email mom_worklife@mom.gov.sg with your name, designation and organisation to register; or
- Email mom_worklife@mom.gov.sg with your queries.

Annex B

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