
UPDATE: SUMMER 2005

In recent months, we've spent a lot of time debating how we can make our communications both more interesting, and more useful. As a consequence, we will be updating both our website and our blog over the summer.

The blog will focus much more on what we actually get up to with clients; and we plan to make more of our checklists and guidelines available via our website.

We will also be re-focusing our newsletter to contain more hints and tips on how to tackle various issues around generating and maintaining work-life balance. This issue, for example, looks at cross-cultural work-life balance.

If there's a topic you would particularly like us to address, or a question you would like answered, please email us at the address below and we'll do our best to oblige.

The Work-Life Balance coach/mentor programme

We know work-life balance is an area where HR Specialists are keen to make a positive impact, so we're delighted to announce our new coach/mentor programme.

Based on our work with a wide range of DTI WLB Challenge Fund clients, the 12-month structured programme will enable HR specialists to progress the WLB culture in their organisations, while developing their own strategic HR skills.

Providing both acquisitional and transformational coaching, the process will enhance individual expertise in strategic WLB issues while enabling 'stretch' to skills and behaviours.

Although HR is generally involved in buying coaching for other parts of the organisation, its own needs can often be overlooked. We hope our programme will help redress the situation.

Email us for more details!

"Life-work balance is not going to blow away, it is here to stay. How you harness it inside the business may vary, but those that recognise and celebrate flexibility and diversity will most probably have an edge on the competitors"

Mike Johnson, "New Rules of Engagement", CIPD 2004

Work-life balance and the expatriate manager

Your company has sent you to Tokyo for two years. Your family can't travel with you because the children are going through exams back at home. You don't speak much Japanese yet, so activities outside work are restricted. You're hardworking and ambitious, so you stay late at the office most nights. So it seems, does everyone else.

Why don't your staff ever seem to go home?

There are at least two cultural factors here and both can be traced back to attitudes towards hierarchy.

The manager inadvertently sets the standard by staying on at work, thereby signalling that employees should follow. As long as the boss works on – everyone else will.

The second factor is about communication. Whilst the expatriate may wonder at the hardworking people in the team, few Japanese employees would take the lead and point out why it was happening and what was needed for it to stop (ie for the manager to go home at a reasonable hour so the employees can get to see their families!).

Managing Cross-cultural work-life balance

Work-life balance is so culturally influenced that it is easy to overlook the fact that everyone will have a different outlook. Organisations which plan to offer a one-size fits all programme, will need to take diversity issues into consideration. What are these? Here are two steps taken from our checklist for organisations...

1. **Family relationships.**
Family size and extent will vary from one culture to another. With a focus on the care of small children predominating, it is easy to forget that in many cultures, care of the elderly as well as responsibility towards members of the extended family will have just as much importance. You may wish to consider how to accommodate an employee's additional responsibilities.
2. **Flexible benefits.**
Depending on the kind of benefits your organisation plans to offer, you may need to take cultural values into account. If you are a bank offering traditional mortgage benefits for employees, this may not attract someone whose religion proscribes the taking or giving of interest on money. If you offer a gold standard pension scheme, this may not attract employees whose culture assumes that older people will be provided for by the family. In both these cases it may be worth considering alternative benefits you could offer.

If you are interested in the complete checklist, please contact us for a free copy.

"In the future, flexibility won't be a program, a policy, a benefit, or a perk. It will become the way we work" according to the Families and Work Institute, New York.

Their report 'When Work Works' makes the point that while employers continue to strive for increased employee engagement, most initiatives consider only one aspect of their people – the work side. They forget employees have lives outside work.

As we continue the transition from Industrial to Digital Age leading edge employers are increasingly focussing on results – whether and how well work is done. Others, however, continue to believe only presence equals productivity and commitment.

Flexible work arrangements are a critical component of effective workplaces, says the Institute. Its research has consistently shown flexibility is linked to engagement, retention, job satisfaction and employee well-being.

What's more, in the US at least, a staggering 79% of employees say they want more flexibility and would take advantage of flexibility if their job permitted it and there were no negative consequences.

Around 66% of employees already have access to some sort of flexitime – up from 47% in 1992 – with the vast majority taking advantage of current arrangements.

However, the report cautions that:

"Some managers may find it difficult to break with traditional ways of doing things and some employees may not be able to handle new responsibilities of working with more autonomy, decision-making authority and flexibility."

Facilitating flexibility through training:

HalsAllan Workshops 2005

As an addition to our established portfolio of strategic flexible working, diversity and work-life balance workshops, we have developed two new courses for 2005 focusing on operational issues.

Attracting and recruiting the flexible workforce is a practical skills-based course enabling organisations to use recruitment strategies based on flexible working to attract a wider pool of potential talent.

Performance management in a flexible work environment aims to address some of the issues raised by the Families and Work Institute report. How managers can be encouraged to embrace new ways of working; and to focus more on results and on how well work is being done, rather than where and when it is done.

All our workshops can be tailored for presentation in-house; and we also run an open programme in Central London. For more information go to our website or contact us by email.